

**JUST
LOOKIN'**



AROUND

**WITH
CLEVE WILKIE**

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CLEVE WILKIE

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RAGLAND

PREFACE

I don't suppose there's a columnist alive who doesn't think his great works should be compiled into a world-shaking book and preserved for future generations and all time!

Well, this little volume certainly isn't going to shake up anything, but, at least, it represents a preservation in permanent form of some of "my great works" for the friends here and there who have expressed a desire for such a project, and solemnly swore they would purchase it if I ever got it out - and if I end up with 1,000 unsold books cluttering up my domicile, I'm gonna clear the earth of a few of my Friends! If the mess brings a tinge of joy, a few delightful moments, and a smile or two, then its mission and purpose will have been accomplished, and the world can remain unshook as far as I'm concerned.

I want to express my deep appreciation to the 30 or more papers across the state which have carried the column over the years, providing me with an audience and influence I didn't deserve, but which I cherish and relish.

Also, my profound appreciation is expressed for Mrs. Nancy Stephens over in Wilson who spent many extra hours getting the manuscript ready on her word processor - to my gifted neighbor, Robert F. Smith, whose talents made possible the attractive cover and delightful illustrations. These two are friends, indeed!

Hang in there dear reader - if this one goes well, I've got enough junk on hand for 40 more volumes!

Cleve Wilkie



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INTRODUCTION - MEET CLEVE

DENNIS ROGERS - "THE RALEIGH NEWS & OBSERVER"

July 31, 1986

KINSTON - The Rev. Cleve Wilkie says it takes two things to be a preacher: the brass to make your own horn and the hot air to blow it.

I've put off meeting and writing about Cleve for way too long. I've chuckled over his stories and his letters for many years now and last week, as he was taking a break between preaching trips, I had my chance to visit him at his home in Kinston and I took it.

For a preacher who hasn't had his own pulpit for more than three decades, Cleve is probably as well known in North Carolina as any Baptist around. He has been a fixture with the Baptist State Convention since the early 1950s and over the years has preached in more than 2,000 of the state's 3,600 Baptist churches.

For most of those years he also has written a weekly newspaper column for small newspapers across the state. Although it was distributed by the Baptists, it is a light, charming column that slips you a moral message when you aren't looking instead of hitting you over the head. I've retold several of his stories here, and invariably they are the most popular ones I've written.

"I've written over a million words," he said, "And never got paid a dime for it. Well, there was one time when I got \$8."

Cleve grew up in the Baptist Children's Home in Thomasville and decided when he was 9 years old that he wanted to be a missionary in China. And, like most things, there is a Cleve Wilkie story in it.

"There had been a revival at the home that week, and one morning I got up at 4:30 to go get the cows in," he said. "Just as I started to open the gate, I heard a noise. I looked around with my flashlight and I saw a puppy caught in some barbed wire. He was just pitiful, whining and looking at me with those big, sad eyes. You never heard such a plea for help in your life."

"I got him out, and he was in my arms trying to lick my face. I knew at that moment that I wanted to serve the people of the world. I was transfixed. That puppy seemed to represent all the people who needed help. You might say I was called to preach through the eyes of a dog."

Cleve graduated from high school at 16: "When I got

out of school I knew how to do two things, milk cows and wash dishes. That was because my job was to work in the dairy and because they made us wash dishes as punishment. You had to wash dishes a certain amount of time for each infraction of the rules. I was there 10 years and left owing them time in the kitchen.

"I remember the day I graduated. That was a lonesome feeling walking across that stage knowing they expected you to be gone that night. I'd been there since I was six.

"I showed up at Wake Forest College without a cent of money. I got a job in the cafeteria washing dishes so dish washing got me three meals a day. I went to a boarding house to find a room, and the lady said she needed a special student to stay there. I told her I was special, but she said she needed somebody who could milk a cow. I told her to point me at the cow, and she watched me milk it before she'd give me the room. The manager of the bookstore grew up in the children's home and he gave me old books so I went to college.

"Between working, math, and falling in love with a girl at Meredith College, I almost didn't make it. I had to borrow the tuition of \$32.50 a quarter from the children's home."

But he made it, and a career preaching the Gospel was launched. He never did make it to China as a missionary, but a missionary he became, taking his message of God and brotherhood all over North Carolina and West Virginia.

A delightful speaker, he has worked as a coordinator for the statewide Baptist organization and guest preacher in just about any Baptist church you can name. In 1980 he was chosen to lead a missionary drive into the hills of West Virginia.

"There weren't but 100 Southern Baptist churches in West Virginia in 1980," he said. "Using folks from North Carolina, we built 26 new ones and renovated 27 others. Those folks would go in and put up a church in a week."

Cleve retired last year. The idea was that he would spend some time relaxing and playing golf. He is a championship golfer who holds the course record at several courses (including 17 holes in one, a sizzling 58 on one course and a score of 61 when he was age 63). But he's stayed busier than ever, preaching revivals and making speeches. People just love to hear Cleve Wilkie preach.

"The Lord has blessed me," he said.

I think of it another way. I think the Lord blessed us with Cleve.

JUST LOOKIN' AROUND



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ZOO KEEPER

My present job and title is Assistant Coordinator for the West Virginia-North Carolina "Mountain State 200 Project" - with the 200 representing the number of Southern Baptist churches we hope to have in West Virginia by the end of 1985, with Baptists in the two states working and sharing together. Someone asked me what a "coordinator" was, and I replied, "I guess it's someone who works at both ends of something to try to keep the middle from collapsing." Anyway, I'm working both ends - West Virginia and North Carolina - and the only thing about to collapse so far in the whole thing is me!

However, last fall during a missions conference in the big Gaston Association in and around Gastonia, I really had trouble explaining to the folks there just what I do - due to a typographical error at the East Baptist Church in the Sunday bulletin by the church secretary, Irene L. Dove. But sometimes, errors inadvertently come closer to the truth than the real thing. That might have been true in this case.

I was the speaker for a Sunday night service at the church, while my good friend, Rev. John Beam, Sr., Director of the Baptist Center in Savannah, Georgia, was the speaker that morning. Irene had little biographical sketches of Beam and myself in the bulletin in order to introduce us to the folks. In the course of the paragraph on me, her left little finger went off into a tangent out in right field, got jammed up, didn't do right, and came down on the wrong key, and instead of me being a coordinator in a good 200 project, I came out as the Assistant Coordinator for the "West Virginia-North Carolina ZOO Project."

John said he noted the title as he looked at the bulletin that morning, and wondered to himself, "What kind of nature project Wilkie was on up in West Virginia." He hadn't seen me in years and didn't know where or what I was. I guess he thought I was trying to trap West Virginia black bears for the North Carolina Zoo at Asheboro.

But when I came along that night and saw the mistake, I had a ball-guying Irene, mercilessly, who was sick and not present, and then showing the bulletin around at a general meeting of pastors and missionaries the next morning - and I took a lot of flak and monkey business myself from the whole bunch - fun!

Later, I got a copy of the bulletin from Irene in the

mail, with a note attached saying, "Mr. Wilkie, I'm sorry I didn't get to meet you. However, since I have become famous among Gaston Baptists, I thought you might want an autographed bulletin. Keep the 'ZOO' project going!"

That autographed bulletin, along with the note, is now one of my most prized possessions. I still get a kick out of it, and showing it around - so Irene's fame can keep spreading. And I just might be in the same order, after all, of Dennis the Menace who was depicted recently standing in the opened front door holding Mrs. Wilson's hand, all ready and anxious to go, with crotchety Mr. Wilson protesting from his easy chair and paper through the door from his study, "But I didn't say I'd take Dennis to the zoo - I said he BELONGED in the zoo!"

BIG BULLS

In the Hickory Baptist Church near Whitakers, Gene and Sarah Watson are twin "pillars of the church," and have been for years - active, involved leaders and contributors on every level and facet of church life, as well as participants in denominational affairs beyond the local level.

Gene is a large, successful farmer deluxe and a so-so golfer. I say "so-so" because most of the time, despite his valiant efforts, he can't even beat me, and anybody who can't beat me certainly isn't a "deluxe" golfer. He did get the best of me on one occasion when I had a broken big toe, blisters on my hands, a slipped disc, and poison oak all in my eyes. But he might really improve one of these days, for he and Sarah own and operate the Hickory Meadows golf course just off Interstate 95 north at the Whitakers exit, and he can certainly play and practice all he desires. I'll keep my eye on him and I'll quit stopping by for golf whenever he starts whipping me. I lose a friend immediately when he starts whomping me at golf. I haven't got many friends left!

However, Gene teed off on me in another area one time, and about "drove the green" with a mighty wallop. I was in a revival at Hickory Church and spent the week as guest in Gene's sumptuous home, which is just across the road from the church. A lush, fenced pasture borders his back yard and during the week several growing, fat steers were grazing and snorting away in the thing, including a broad

black bull.

One night I was delayed and stayed behind to dress for church while Gene and Sarah went on over for the beginning of the services as Sarah had to play the piano. It was dark outside, but a full moon bathed things in shimmering light. As I busied myself with shirt and britches, I heard some strange noises outside - scraping, shuffling, and heavy breathing - right at the opened window.

When I cautiously slunk over, cupped my eyes with my hands, and peered out, I came snout to snout with that ole black bull standing there in the moonlight with his wet nose against the screen, surrounded by other staring steers. I about jumped right back out of my preaching britches in sheer shock and surprise. The fascinated bull just stood and stared at the sight he was seeing.

I hurried over to the church, slipped in, located Gene on the end of a pew, eased down, and whispered to him that his dang bull was out grazing on his fine lawn instead of the pasture, and scaring the devil outta unwary preachers. He immediately rose and took off up the aisle for home, with Sarah looking on from up front with questions in her eyes. I later whispered to her what the matter was about, and she giggled out loud, and seemed relieved. Gene crept back into the church about 20 minutes later, well after I had started preaching.

In talking about the incident later, the golfing rascal told somebody, "I got my bull at home shut up, all right, without any trouble - but when I got back to the church I couldn't shut up all that bull in our pulpit!"

"Fore!"

IN THE LAND OF UR

One of the most unforgettable experiences for a Baptist preacher comes very early in his career - when he is formally ordained to the Gospel Ministry, which involves appearing before an appointed "Ordination Council" for examination, testing, approval, and recommendation.

I underwent the examination and testing over 41 years ago, and there is no way I'll ever forget the experience. But it graphically illustrated the old truism "That the Good Lord looks after fools and babies." I was a college fool and a spiritual babe at the time.

The very sight of my ordination council was awesome

and frightening to a scared, skinny, budding college senior. I was ceremoniously set down amongst what had to be the largest council ever assembled by Baptists anywhere - in the giant Tabernacle Baptist Church in Raleigh.

It was presided over by big, genial Dr. Forest C. Feezor, pastor of the church, and composed of his entire Board of Deacons, about every doctored Baptist preacher in Raleigh, and several professors from Meredith and Wake Forest Colleges - over 60 stern, erudite Baptist examiners in all. I shook worse than a frozen puppy, and prayed desperately for Divine intervention. It came in due time!

I stumbled a few times, but got through the preliminaries of relating my Christian experience and call to the ministry - but then came the Bible and theology! I managed pretty satisfactory answers to some simple questions on Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Church in general, but dreaded the thought of things getting deeper and tougher. Some of them professors began to loosen up their collars for action, and the preachers were arranging their notes. I felt like a condemned man standing on the gallows with the rope already tight around his sweating neck. I prayed some more.

But at this point, Dr. Feezor said, "Now, Cleveland, you are going to be preaching the Bible as a minister, and we don't expect you to know it in detail at this stage, but you should at least be conversant with some of its outstanding characters and events. What, for instance, could you tell us about - say, Abraham?"

Now, folks, would you believe that very afternoon over at Wake Forest I had taken a test on religion class where one of the main questions was "Outline the Life and Career of Abraham," and that I had studied well for the exam, for a change!

Boy, I lit in, and without a moment's hesitation, confidently picked up old Abraham in the Land of Ur and carried him in perfect chronological order, without missing a trick, plumb to the grave.

One wide-eyed, awed deacon immediately stood and injected, "I move that we heartily and unanimously recommend this young man for the ordination to the Gospel Ministry!" He thought I was a Bible wizard.

Aside from Brother Abraham, Dr. Feezor could have asked me who were Andrew, Peter, James, and John, and I probably would have said "The Marx Brothers." The Lord reigneth!

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NIGHT CRAWLERS

Modern, high-powered, long-lasting pesticides, plus professional exterminators, have largely eliminated common household pests, and we don't have to put up with the things these days. But it wasn't always that way, for time was when you could find most anything in a house, especially one out in the country.

In early 1942, I forsook my brand new bride at Youngsville and took off for barren, sandy Bladen County for a week's revival in a big country church, which I'll not name. The members were poor, struggling, hard-working farmers, who really had a time growing bumper crops in all that white, loose sand. Things are better for them today - forty years later. Methods have greatly improved.

The church had an odd policy of doling out the visiting preacher to a different family each night after services; so I came to church each time with my suitcase packed, ready for my next home. I never did get unpacked real good the whole week and I thought it was just a lot of trouble and bother for the preacher.

About midweek I was passed over to two grey-haired, old-maid sisters for bedding and feeding that night and the next day. It turned out that they lived in a rambling, crumbling, unpainted farm house set down in a sandy wasteland with one big oak tree towering over it. There was no electricity or indoor plumbing - just a pump and a pot!

I was bedded down for the night on an ancient, rusty, iron-posted bed with a thick, knotty cotton mattress - on which I'm dead sure George Washington never slept, though it was bound to have been available to him. A big nail on the wall held my britches, and a kerosene lamp on a crude table shed yellow light over everything.

I slept, all right, but not very good - and not in that bed. I had scarcely doused the lamp and adjusted my weak back to the knots before I began to feel mysterious things crawling all over me. I jumped up, relit the lamp, and watched in horror as bed bugs big as Cadillac hubcaps scattered in frantic profusion all over that bed - like a colony of ants - hundreds of 'em!

Well, I took a quilt off a chair, shook and examined it, blew out the lamp, silently opened the window, went through it into the chilly night air, wrapped up and leaned back against the oak tree, and restlessly snoozed. I had

to change positions one time when I found myself in the direct firing range of some birds who chose that isolated oak for roosting purposes - otherwise, things went tolerably well, and I got through the night.

Early in the morning, I was half-way back through the window when there was a tap on the lockless door, and one of the good sisters asked, "Brother Wilkie, are you ready for breakfast?"

"I'm half-way there, " I replied loudly, praying she wouldn't open that door, "just give me another leg - I mean another minute - and I'll be right there!"

Well, I ended up most thankful for their queer policy of moving the preacher every night. The next house on the agenda at least didn't have bedbugs; only hound dogs, tom cats - and fleas!

SHOOT OUT

I'm dead sure it must have been me preaching in a church somewhere when it was reported that a restless little girl punched her mother and anxiously asked, "Mommy, when is that preacher gonna get done?" and mommy whispered right back, "Hush, honey, he got done twenty minutes ago - he just won't quit!" That's me!

But I definitely recall one instance where I got real done in a hurry - no ifs, ands, and buts - I mean I got done and finished in no uncertain terms.

I went up to Bethesda Church near Clayton several years ago to conduct a church-wide stewardship clinic, with the sessions scheduled from 7 until 9 each night. I was busy before the first session getting certain materials distributed about on the pews for the people's use when I felt a tug on my coattail, turned around, and looked down into the up-turned, bespectacled, freckled, smiling face of a tow-headed boy - about a first grader.

"Who you?" he asked brightly, as folks were gathering. He lisped just enough to make things intriguing.

I told him all about myself, then inquired, "And who might you be, my fine fellow?"

"I'm Jimmy," he answered, "I live just across the road. Need any help, Mr. Wilkie?"

"Sure," I said, handing him some booklets, "Just put these out along the pews for me and that will be a big help." He took off with them, and did an excellent job.

The folks, like all Baptists, were slow getting in and settled, so it was 7:15 before I got underway. But I went ahead with the full two hours, taking a ten-minute break in the middle, and ended by strongly urging everyone to return the next night, "as you have just gotten half of things here tonight." I had a lot more to say.

Jimmy walked up and said, "Mr. Wilkie, I won't be back tomorrow night."

"Why, Jimmy," I asked, "you're not sick, are you?"

Rolling back his sleeve and seriously looking at a Mickey Mouse watch ticking away on his wrist like a time bomb, Jimmy twanged haltingly, "Well, it's twenty minutes past nine now, and tomorrow night at nine o'clock Gunsmoke comes on - and I can't miss that."

I explained to him that we had gotten started late, but that the next night I'd be sure to start and quit right on time - and that I'd go watch Gunsmoke with him, as I liked it, too. "You just come on back and time me, Jimmy - see if I don't stop on time," I urged. "Besides, who will help me with all these materials? I need you."

He came back, helped me with the materials, and took a seat right on the front pew under my nose. I moved along in high gear, took the mid-way break, and was rolling toward the conclusion of things, when all of a sudden Jimmy jumped straight up to both feet and cried loudly, "Mr. Wilkie?"

"Yes, Jimmy?" I asked, pausing. Every eye was on Jimmy.

Extending his arm and staring at that Mickey Mouse watch, with everything as silent and still as the grave, he finally piped out in a loud, lisping voice they they heard plumb down in Australia, "Mr. Wilkie -- Shud-up!"

Well, we missed the opening commercials, but me and Jimmy didn't miss a single word, shot, or blow on Gunsmoke! It was better than my clinic!

ALL EARS

While on a long trip recently, I stopped to attend services in a certain large city church which was pastored by a well-known preacher. I especially wanted to hear him and be blessed by his ministry. Services were already underway when I arrived, so I was ushered up some steps and seated on the front row in the spacious balcony. The

downstairs auditorium was jam-packed.

It proved to an advantageous and enlightening position, as it afforded a good view of the pulpit, choir, and most of the congregation below. The preacher was lively, strong and energetic, all right, but as I observed some of the members during the sermon I wondered why they bothered to come, for they certainly didn't hear much of what he preached. Their minds and attention were occupied with other things.

For instance, there was the usual number of pew-slouchers, nodders, and sleepers - including a young boy beside me who kept falling against me every time he passed out. I kept straightening him up throughout the whole service. "These sleepy folks might as well have stayed home in bed," I thought to myself.

And over to the right below, a pew full of typical teenagers kept themselves amused with note passing and stifled giggles. Two of them engaged in a hot, repetitive game of Tic-Tac-Toe on a sheet of paper between them. "Where are the parents of these younguns? They ought to be here to see that they properly worship," I remonstrated to myself.

Then I noticed this couple down on my left who kept putting their heads together and whispering into each other's ear, constantly looking around. They must have "gone over" everybody in the congregation "piece by piece." Again I said to myself, "Those two might as well be holding hands and gossiping in some dimly-lit booth in a remote restaurant."

And my eye caught a member of the choir on the back row with an opened hymnal silently mouthing and intoning next Sunday's special, enrapt in her musical manipulations and totally impervious to the preacher directly in front of her. She finally closed the hymnal, and turned to "doing her nails" so she'd look good for next Sunday's special. "My, my," I said, shaking my head.

To top it off, I saw a woman below open her black purse, remove a small paperback book, hold it low in her lap behind the purse - then read it throughout the entire sermon. She didn't look up at the preacher two times. "The good preacher certainly wasted a lot of energy, time, and preparation on that indifferent sister," I judged righteously.

Well, all in all, I guess it was a great service and sermon. But I don't remember two words the powerful

preacher said, either -- I was too busy looking around and taking notes for this column!

SKUNK TAILS

The ears are sneaky little bodily appendages that can play all sorts of tricks on you. Sounds can be distorted by so many things, plus inattention, that sometimes you can never be sure of exactly what you're hearing.

Back in my childhood at the Baptist Children's Home in Thomasville, where I lived in a cottage with 44 other growing boys of every description (and a few beyond all description), I got in trouble one day with a strict matron's listening ears which played tricks on her. She heard me say "downright," and declared emphatically that I uttered something much worse and sinful, and I couldn't convince her otherwise.

On a shelf in her quarters she kept a big bar of octagon soap and a sharp knife and when she overheard a foul word from a boy's mouth, she grabbed him by the ears, promptly marched him into her room, and a generous slab of octagon soap was shoved into his mouth to cleanse and purify the putrid cavity. She stood there with folded arms until it was chewed up real good, popping your jaw if chewing ceased to keep things active and redemptive.

My inadvertent "downright" got me a liberal sliver of her octagon soap, four slaps, and a stern lecture, with me wishing all along that she'd use that soap to wash out her ears!

But not long ago, up at Webb's Chapel near Macclesfield, I was the guilty party. With big, floppy, hound-dog ears like I possess, I should never have any trouble hearing things distinctly and correctly - but I really garbled things on that occasion.

I was seated on the front pew waiting to speak to the good folks on World Missions. I had my Bible opened to my text and giving half attention to that and half to the good pastor in the pulpit as he conducted the service. I must have had my nose in the Bible when I heard the pastor request, "Mr. Stumphale, would you lead us in prayer just before Brother Wilkie comes to preach for us?" I did close my Bible at that point and give full attention to the prayer - and it was beautiful.

So when I got into the pulpit, trusting my ears, I

said strongly, "I certainly did appreciate your beautiful and meaningful prayer, Mr. Skunktail."

I declare to you, the roof of the church was practically blown off by the simultaneous roars from the congregation that followed. It took me ten minutes to get things quieted down and learn the truth that my hearing in regard to Mr. Stumphale hadn't been so hot.

He saw me two weeks later and ruefully remarked, "Brother, you really fixed me - I might as well go to court now and have my name officially changed to 'Skunktail.' It was bad enough, as you can see, before you came along!"

Well in the old ball game, the ump declares, "I call'em like I see'em" - and out in good Baptist churches here and there, I just call 'em like I hear 'em!

THE FIRST ONE

I've made thousands of speeches of every sort all over creation, it seems, but I'll never forget the first one. There's nothing like the "first" in anything - it stands alone, regardless of what follows.

My first public speech came when I was an eighth grader at the Mills Home in Thomasville. I was chosen to go out with a faculty member "to represent the Home" before churches and associations to create "good impressions and raise money." I was so skinny, sickly, and emaciated that I guess they figured the very sight and sound of me would produce immediate, soul-stirring sympathy and folks would thus give most generously; so they started showing off my little ole knotty knees all over the state for the next four years - until I graduated and left the Home.

But it started in the great big old First Baptist Church in Raleigh in November 1932, during that church's annual Thanksgiving service for the Children's Home, under the leadership of pastor J. Powell Tucker. I went from the Home with Dr. John Arch McMillan who was to be the main speaker - but they gave me a four-minute shot before the main blast went off.

I had written a little speech entitled "Why I Like Mills Home," and had carefully, laboriously memorized and practiced it a "thousand times" in every conceivable place and manner.

The church was crammed with at least 800 folks, and they stood me on the second step of the high rostrum to

deliver my masterpiece to them. Well, when I got settled, looked up, got my fuzzy eyes in focus, and saw that great wavering sea of expectant faces - I went into total shock and absolutely froze! I stood there like a mesmerized totem pole, heart slam up to my scalp, legs stiff as hoe handles, arms glued to my side like broom sticks, palms running water like a leaky well bucket, and staring straight ahead with blue eyes stuck in my noggin like I was an up-right corpse. I was scared plumb to double-death!

With some persistent, audible urging from Dr. McMillan, I finally managed to swallow hard, primed my tonsils until they backfired a couple of times, sucked my tongue back up from my throat, took a gulping breath, and cut loose in a tiny, high, pip-squeaky voice that got higher and louder with every chopped sentence - but I got through it!

I still couldn't move, so they had to come unbend me and carry me back to my seat, where they placed me down beside Brother Tucker. He patted my tousled hair, took my sweaty hand and slipped something flat and cold into my damp palm. It was a fifty-cent piece. My eyes got as wide as the seven seas, as I didn't even know then that they made money that big. My hand clamped down on that treasure with a grasp you couldn't have loosened with a Farmall tractor.

Well, as I said, I've made thousands of speeches since and "ain't nobody give me as much as a dime," so that must have been the best speech I ever made - I haven't preached a fifty-cent sermon since!

SOLEMN SERVICE

Though I tend to be light, and even frivolous maybe, most of the time, I do get serious when I get down to preaching! But even then, as the occasion permits, I usually try to liven up my dry sermons a bit with a humorous illustration or two - if I think of some that fit - especially if the congregation looks as if it needs waking up. It usually works and gets a rise out of most sleepy folks, and I have no trouble "coming across."

But sometimes things go flatter than a desert, despite every effort to inject life and reaction. I recall in one particular remote mountain church where I hit a brick wall and plopped on my red face, despite doing everything but

handstands and a jig to try to get a rise out of those stern folks. I threw in every funny illustration that I thought fitted - and some that didn't - and they sat there with stone faces that reminded me of the Petrified Forest - not a crease or a trace of a smile, nor a sign of any kind of response, from young or old, and I was beginning to feel that I was wasting mine and the Lord's good time in trying to get something across to them. I could even feel the pastor looking daggers at me from his seat behind me on the rostrum. I turned and looked at him once - that was enough. He sat there like a funeral director who had got caught on the wrong end of the hearse.

And one old sister in particular sat below me on the front pew, with firm, set lips, folded hands, and a cold stare that would have felled a northern moose. I winced every time I looked at her and felt guilty for even being there, as she seemed to develop pure disdain as I rattled on. I gave up on her for sure. I said "Amen" long before 12 o'clock!

But after services as I stood in the doorway greeting the folks, trying to recoup something from the affair, she lingered by until the last one had passed. She approached me with a grin on her face, of all things - and I gingerly grinned back.

"Brother Wilkie," she exuded, taking my hand in a firm grasp, "I tell you, brother, I really enjoyed your message - especially those stories about the cows and goats - can't wait to tell them to my husband who's home sick in bed - they'll make him well!"

"Well, sister," I replied, trying to be lighthearted, "I noticed you, all right - and you sat there right under me like you had vinegar on your tongue and was about to throw up - I never saw such a sour puss, frankly."

"Oh, that was put on - I was giggling all inside like a bowl of flabby jello. I practically split my spleen, blew out a tonsil, and punctured my left lung to keep from laughing right out loud."

Well, why didn't you let it out? I sure would have felt better about it, that's for sure."

"Oh, around here we just don't believe in that laughing in church - our pastor says it's sinful - and he was sitting up there looking straight at me!"

We both had a good laugh - right out loud!

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BIDDIE BITS

I was in a revival not long ago at the First Baptist Church of Chester, West Virginia, which is absolutely as far as you can go up the northern West Virginia panhandle without getting your feet wet and ending up across the river in Ohio.

The young, growing church at Chester is pastored by a native Tar Heel, Reverend Steve Hardin, who grew up in the foothills at Forest City. Big, robust Steve was one of those "late bloomers" in the Gospel Ministry, being over 30 when "I quit all my meanness and let the Good Lord get hold of me." with a wife and four children, he spent 8 years preparing himself for an effective ministry, first at Fruitland Bible Institute, then at Gardner-Webb College, topping things off with some courses at Southeastern Seminary. He pastored several churches in North Carolina, including Mull's Chapel at Hickory, before answering the call to "Pioneer Missions" as represented by the challenging work at Chester. He brought the wife and two of the children to Chester with him, leaving two grown children back in North Carolina - plus a grandbaby!

I trust Steve is having more success making his native Tar Heel tongue and lingo plain to those northern West Virginians than I did one night during the revival. Referring to a 100 yard long chicken house running over with freshly hatched little ones, I said, "It looked as if it had snowed biddies from heaven - you never saw so many biddies in one place in all your life."

After services a bunch of lively children gathered around me at the door and jostled me about my "biddies," saying they had never heard the word and wanted to know what I was talking about. I carefully explained that the wet little critters that come crawling out of hen eggs are called "biddies."

"Oh," one girl laughed, "that's what we call dibbies up here."

"That sounds like a game of marbles back home," I said.

"Shucks," added a bright-eyed lad, "my dad calls them peepies."

"You better check on your poppa - down in North Carolina peepies are dirty movies," I enjoined.

"Well," injected another girl, "we call them cheepies at our house."

"I always thought cheepies were second-hand bargains at an auction," I teased.

"Why not do like we do on our farm," offered a blonde little girl, tugging on my coat, "and just call them chicks?"

"Then, you might grow up to be one yourself," I warned her, "for that's what the soldiers at Fort Bragg down in North Carolina call pretty girls."

But a good, grey-haired lady standing by listening in capped things off by saying lightly, "Brother Wilkie, don't let these kids fool you. They knew all along what you were talking about, for they're always referring to us elder ladies behind our backs as 'them old biddies' - they know!"

I laughed, acted innocent, and didn't tell her that's what I also call certain crusty-shelled, cranky, cackling old ladies back in North Carolina.

So, maybe after all, a biddie, regardless of what state you're in, is nothing but an old hen who can't peep, cheep, or do the dib!

NICOTINE NERVES

Sometimes a man's sense of right and wrong takes an awful whipping under certain, sudden extenuating circumstances. I saw it happen not long ago.

I stopped by Jim's house in a nearby village to deliver some stewardship materials he had requested for use in a finance committee meeting at his church. He was an active and involved deacon in the local Baptist church. It was a hot Saturday afternoon.

We had just settled on his front porch when a car entered the driveway and stopped before us. When the portly driver stepped out, Jim stood, threw up a hand and said cheerily, "Hi, preacher - come on up."

After formal introductions and friendly greetings, we sat again, with the preacher close to Jim. I just sat and listened from there on out, as the pastor turned his full attention to Jim.

"I'll just take a minute of your time, Jim," he began, "but I have a problem and need your help."

"How's that, preacher?" asked Jim slowly. "You know I'll always do what I can to help my good pastor."

"It's some of the men at our church - and women, too, I guess," he intoned seriously. "But they're smoking in

the restrooms, and other places in and around the church building, and I just don't like it. Don't you think that's wrong, Jim?"

"Well, it doesn't look exactly right, does it?"

"I want you deacons to help me tactfully put a stop to it. You'd help me in that, wouldn't you, Jim?"

"Well, we'll do what we can, I'm sure, preacher," said Jim.

"I'm proud of that fact that none of our deacons smoke - aren't you, Jim?" pressed the pastor, sidling up closer.

"Yea, preacher - we're a pretty good bunch of fellows on the whole, I guess," answered Jim finger on nose.

"Smoking is one of the dirtiest, filthiest habits a man can have, don't you agree, Jim?" The pastor was grim.

"Well, it's a nasty habit, all right."

"A man ought to think more of his body than to mess it up with smoke, don't you think, Jim?"

"It's tough on the body, I'm sure, preacher," mumbled Jim. "Really fouls up the breath."

"I'm going to preach on smoking tomorrow morning and get things moving. You'll back me, won't you, Jim?"

"Well, preacher, I'll be there."

"Good," answered the pastor firmly, rising, "I may want you to give a strong testimony."

"Well, preacher," hedged Jim, standing, "I'm mighty weak on testimony."

"I might call on you for one if things get stirring, so be ready." He was at his car, and left without further word.

Jim slowly sat, fumbled in his coat pocket for something, glanced at me, and said dolorously, "Gad! I'm gonna have to develop a jim-dandy case of laryngitis before church time in the morning. I thought preacher never would get through and leave so I could light one up!"

A BILLION BUGS

Today the Parrish Memorial Church up in Johnston County worships in a beautiful, commodious, air-conditioned brick building. But I recall a trip there over 20 years ago when their building was wood, small, crowded, and hot - especially on the mid-July Sunday night when things were at their humid, muggy worse. The "air-conditioning" consisted of opened, screenless doors and windows.

The little auditorium was lighted by three large, naked light bulbs hanging on long cords from the ceiling, one of which dropped down directly over the pulpit just above head-high. Those lights certainly attracted the winged bugs from the outside, and they swarmed in through the opened doors and windows and went into frenzied orbit around those lights, especially the one above the pulpit, with more and more zinging in every minute.

Eventually, such a thick glob of bugs was gyrating around that light that it caused a 300 watt light bulb to go into almost total eclipse. I know that every species of bug the Good Lord ever called into creation had at least one representative around that light!

By the time I got up to preach the bugs zooming above and around me looked and sounded like the "hordes of Asia" on the rampage. I hadn't read the first sentence of my text before here they came down on me - dropping in my thick thatch, squirming down my collar, crawling up my shirt sleeve, and creeping up my pant's leg. I scratched, thumped, swatted, shook, stomped, and wiggled in agony until I looked like I had Saint Vitus Dance.

A bald-headed deacon reposing on the front row saw my pitiful dilemma, rose and said, "Wait a minute, preacher, and I'll fix those bugs for you."

I spat out a couple of bugs and hastily answered, "Don't know what you got in mind, good brother, but come on and do your thing!"

I stepped back as he came to the rostrum, stooped, scratched around among all the stuff crammed inside the pulpit stand, and came up with a big, 16-ounce "bug bomb."

He got down front and went through more wild contortions than me fighting off the bugs. He first stuck out a foot and poised like he was at target practice, took the cap off the can, cocked his right eye, gritted his teeth, pressed the trigger in his raised right hand, and started fizzing that thing all over creation - back and forth, in and out, up and down and all around. But those old bugs just kept right on zooming despite all the noise and motion.

He finally paused, red-faced and breathless, bent over and shook the can close in his ear, listening intently. He shook and listened again, then looked up at me and said disgustingly, "Shucks, preacher, ain't nothing in this thing!"

If those bugs could have talked, I know they would

have thanked that good deacon for cooling them off on that hot night - that's all he did. I wished he'd aimed the thing at me - I was about to burn up.

Oh, well, that's not the first empty Baptist I ever met!

POT-BELLIED PREACHING

As I go in and out of Baptist churches over North Carolina in my present work, I really enjoy and revel in the quiet, efficient central heating and air-conditioning in most of the church buildings. I don't sweat in the summer or shake in the winter, making for ideal all-year-round preaching conditions.

But I began my feeble ministry over 40 years ago long before the widespread advent of such luxurious contrivances for convenience and comfort. I go back to the nostalgic days of open windows, buzzing insects, perspiration, and a wavy sea of flapping "funeral home" hand fans in the summer - and thick socks, ear muffs, fur coats, sneezes, and pot-bellied, wood-burning stoves in the winter.

Young preachers today, of course, will never have the unique experience of "preaching over" a pot-bellied stove, usually located to one side up front, and which determined the "tone and texture" of the preaching, especially on an unusually cold day. One of my earliest churches featured a wood-burning relic that required constant care and pampering in order to get a warm response.

The sole advantage was that it caused everyone possible to "sit down front," for the back of the building wouldn't warm up before mid-afternoon. But the stove produced almost perpetual stir and movement all during my sermons. When it got too hot, folks would move away from it - sidling back closer when they cooled off - constantly taking off and putting on scarves, gloves and coats.

And right in the middle of my sermons some good, concerned deacon would always move up to stuff more wood in the thing, laboriously adjust the damper, and even loudly, "shake down the ashes" - with all eyes on him while I stood up there preaching to walls and ceiling. And just as sure as I was about to make a big theological point, a red-hot "lightard knot" would explode inside the crackling stove like an atom bomb, causing everyone to jump like they had been shot, and my great point was smothered in the relaxed

aftermath of giggling and tittering. And I had one old sister who would come up at least three times during the service to warm her hands and feet, standing there with her hands stretched over the stove and staring up at me like a wide-eyed monkey. She claimed she had "slow blood" and got cold while sitting still. I never did warm her up or stare her down.

I think a frustrated pastor pretty well summed up the situation on an occasion when he was demonstrating his recalcitrant janitor.

Seems the lazy fellow over-slept about three Sundays in a row, and didn't get a fire going until right at church time - with the result that the church was like a refrigerator filled with chattering teeth and clacking heels, plus congregational complaints afterwards.

The pastor finally said to the sleepy janitor after the fourth frigid service, "Brother, as long you don't do your job on time and get this building warm, you're just an instrument of the devil himself!" He shook a rebuking finger in his face as he spoke.

"Now, how's that, pastor? I'm a good Christian and church member," asked the puzzled janitor.

"Well, how can I effectively preach the real dangers of hell fire to my people in this ice box when the very thought of it is a comfort to them?"

HANG UPS

Sometimes the most innocent, simple things can suddenly become complicated and lead to surprising results - some good, some bad, and some neutral. I think maybe the following is one of the neutral, for I don't think much was accomplished, except to illustrate the point that the simple can become complicated when we don't "let well enough along." I never know when I'm well enough.

But my phone rang the other morning - simple enough. I promptly answered it - simple enough. I voiced a bright, cheery "Hello" - simple enough.

Then a rather gruff feminine voice intoned, "Sorry, I've got the wrong number."

Then I started the complications. "How do you know you've got the wrong number." I asked kindly, "as you don't know who I am?"

"Because you don't look right," she answered sharply.

"Now, just how do I look over the phone?" I pressed, tittering aloud.

"Well, you sound like you look like a funny guy with a nose as long as a bean pole and a mouth big as the mammoth cave."

"I admit I've got a lot of curiosity and talk a lot, but say," I enthusiastically returned, "you sound like my kind of folks - just who are you anyway?"

"Oh, I'd have to know who you are first before I'd pass out information like that on a phone to a total stranger," she cooed.

"Well, I'm not a bit ashamed of my identity," I replied. "I'm E.C. Wilkie."

"The preacher Wilkie?" she inquired.

"A few folks here and there say I can preach a little."

"Well, I happened to hear you last Sunday morning and you didn't do so hot - and you went way too long!"

"Every anonymous phone caller is entitled to her blessed opinion," I answered, smiling - weakly. "I had to take time to make my points, didn't I?"

"You didn't make any points!"

"I get your point - I'll work on that."

"And another thing," she continued, warming to the issue, "it seems every time I drive down Carey Road I see you working in your yard wearing shorts, with no shirt and barefooted. I don't think a preacher oughta be out in public like that. Looks bad."

"I'm saving the shirt and shoes for church-going and preaching," I shot back. "Drive faster next time and the exposed physique won't look so bad if it's blurred."

"And my husband has played golf with you," she crowed on, "said he beat the living red socks off of you not long ago."

"Maybe I was sick that day," I replied blandly, trying to think of who had beaten me lately - everybody had!

"Well, your wife's all right - my daughter is in one of her music classes at school and really likes her. I do, too."

"That's the greatest of compliments, thanks," I said, "Now, tell me who in Kingdom Come you are. I'm dying with curiosity."

"Now you've got the wrong number, preacher!"

She hung up.

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DRIED OUT

Childhood impressions are often the deepest and strongest and most difficult to erase totally. I'm 60 and going on 90, but I'm still deeply indented with one particular impression that won't wear off - and it stems from a man whose marks on my young life I'll carry to my grave - Dr. I. G. Greer, who has been, and will continue to be, the source for many of these poor columns.

One thing always present and handy when Dr. Greer spoke or sang was a big glass of cool water, from which he discreetly took sips at several points, daintily dabbing his lips with a big white handkerchief.

I was just eight-years-old the first time I heard him give a concert of his famous mountain ballads. Between numbers, he'd sip from that glass and dab before continuing. Once he posed with the glass lifted and jovially remarked, "All great singers and speakers deserve to have a glass of water provided for them."

That picture and statement somehow imbedded in my young mind and came to be the ultimate mark of successful distinction in speech-making. It became an obsession with me to be good enough to deserve a glass of water! I grew up to be a preacher and speechmaker, but for years on end, it seemed, I kept on delivering waterless sermons - which is a way of saying my sermons were mighty dry, I guess - not a soul recognized my true greatness!

Finally, one Sunday morning in a little church down east, where I had preached several times and was well-known, I came to the occasion with a real raspy "frog in my throat," and was experiencing voice trouble; so, in desperation, I paused and said, "All great speakers deserve to have a glass of water provided for them, says no less great speaker than Dr. I.G. Greer." I looked around hopefully.

A certain man, whom I knew all too well, promptly rose, went out a door leading into the church kitchen, and soon came back with a tall glass of sparkling water, placed it on the pulpit and returned to his seat. I had a glass of water at last!

Feeling like, and trying to look like, Dr. Greer, I paused, pulled a white handkerchief from my rear pocket, stuck out my chest, pursed my lips, and pompously, but gracefully, lifted the glass to my mouth and took a deep gulp big enough to drown 40 frogs - then coughed, gagged,

sputtered and choked, grabbing my poor throat in pure agony and just about swallowing the dang handkerchief, hem and all -- that blooming water had enough pure salt in it to empty the dead sea! I saw the glass-toting joker bow his head and shake the whole building with smothered laughter.

They really had a hacking, gasping sermon that morning, and afterwards I sank my verbal fangs into that pious prankster with a holy vengeance, knowing I should have expected no better from the rascal and shouldn't have trusted him in the first place.

Among other things, I told him, "You're the big ham, you rascal you, you needed salting down ten times worse than me!"

"Well, he retorted, "you dried up little possum, I didn't want you to think that I really thought you were so great!"

I'm still dry!

POWERLESS PREACHING

Sermons can be delivered on all kinds of occasions and under all sorts of conditions, and I've had my share of unusual places and situations in which to preach. I've held forth under arbors and tents, in parks and camps, in schools and court houses, in homes and trailers, in factories and prisons, in cemeteries and on street corners, as well as in 2,000 or more different churches - but I particularly recall with great relish one occasion in the mountains years ago - the East Fork Baptist Church, situated on Highway #276 at the foot of imposing Wagon Road Gap, 15 miles north of Waynesville up in apple-producing Haywood County.

I drove to the church that wet Sunday night in a torrential rain, which was whipped by fierce, gusty winds, and loudly, as well as brightly, spiced with earth-shaking claps of thunder and brilliant flashes of lightning. It was really a stormy night, and I was sure no-one would be at the little country church under such threatening, nasty conditions. But I underestimated the grit and faithfulness of those hearty souls, for they were there, waiting for me, and filled the church. They were ready to worship - rain or no rain.

The service moved right along under the direction of the fine pastor, and the stirring congregational singing

mixed with the sound of wind and rain outside, was something to hear. They seemed determined to make the Lord hear their praise above all "Heavenly noise," and they did! They just generated a lot of spiritual electricity themselves, and I even got so "pumped up" that I at least hummed real loud.

Well, "preaching time" came, and after a good introduction, I prepared to go at it, opened my Bible, read a four-verse text, and rared back to "splain it" with proper movements to keep things lively and loud.

At this moment, a blinding, ear-splitting bolt of lightning struck nearby outside, and the resulting roll of heavy thunder shook the whole building - and the lights went out - all of them! Some squeamish girls screamed, old folks grunted loudly, and there was a general murmuring, stirring, and scraping of feet as the folks reacted to the initial shock.

I recovered quickly from my own startled jump, and cried out through the pitch blackness, "Now, folks, just don't panic - stay right where you are - don't worry - we'll carry on - I don't use notes, anyhow, so the sermon will proceed unabated - just listen!"

They promptly settled down, got perfectly still and quiet, so I lit into my message with fervor and gusto. Well, I ended up preaching a whole 30-minute sermon in total darkness - those lights never did come back on. I closed by having them sing "Bless Be the Tie That Binds our Hearts in Christian Love," knowing full well that some of them young folks, sitting on the back seat had done found some ties while I was preaching! After the service, car lights were turned on to expedite exit from the building.

Standing in the door, holding my hand, one enthusiastic sister exuded, "Oh, Brother Wilkie, didn't the Lord really bless us in the great service tonight?"

I wrinkled up my puzzled, car-lit left eyebrow, and asked, "Just how is that, sister?"

"Well," she replied happily, "the minute you got up there before us, the Good Lord blew out the lights and we didn't have to look at you!"

HELPING OUT

I'm an ordained Baptist minister, but about the only way in which I'm like the typical Baptist preacher is that

I run my mouth out of gear day and night - mostly while preaching and teaching in various churches. But I haven't pastored a church in over 30 years, having been in "general field work" over the state; so I haven't done much of the usual work of an average pastor - like fussing with deacons, burying the dead, and marrying the foolish.

So I was most flattered recently when the lovely daughter of one of my college mates (from the early forties) asked me to perform her wedding ceremony. I had bumped her on my knee when she was a baby and watched her grow into a beautiful young lady.

I made a date to go up, meet the lucky prospective groom, check on the license, and get all the details planned as to place, time, length, type of ceremony, and participants - all that stuff that has to be worked out in such affairs.

All that done and settled, the little future bride, sitting beside her almost husband, said, "Wilkie, don't you want to talk to us?"

"What about?" I asked, raising an eyebrow, leaning forward.

"Well, about marriage - what makes a good one, how we ought to act, and all that stuff you preachers advise newly-weds," she answered pertly, drawing her legs up beneath her on the couch and settling down comfortably.

"I suppose that would be in order," I said slowly, scratching that raised eyebrow.

"Don't you think two young people should be sure they're really in love before they contemplate marriage?" she pressed.

"Absolutely," I answered.

"And, furthermore, don't you think that a solid marriage rests on mutual trust, with no nagging for details of everything all the time?"

"Sure does," I agreed.

"But they should be honest with each other - not have secrets and hidden sins that might crop up unexpectedly," she added.

"Works better that way, I'm sure," I responded strongly.

"Also, they should be open and above board on the money question, don't you agree, and share together in all available funds?" she asked, pressing the boy's arm and looking into his face.

I agreed heartily.

"And the church should be basic and central in a solid marriage between two Christians like us, shouldn't it?" she asked further.

"Of course I agree with that all the way!"

"Shouldn't we also establish a family altar - read scripture and pray together every day in the home!"

"By all means - so few do anymore these days."

"Our children should have the right of a Christian home, right?" she asked, standing and facing me.

"Goodness yes!" I cried.

She rushed over, threw her arms around my neck, and exuded, "Oh, Wilkie, you're so wise and good. We appreciate your help."

"Don't mention it, honey," I replied proudly, "that's why I came up - to help!"

ELECTION TIME

Through the years I've observed and participated in a passel of Baptist elections of various sorts on every level - small committees, classes, alumni groups, local church, Associations, State and Southern Conventions, and many more. I've even been the object of much voting here and there for this and that - sometimes successfully, and more times not.

Baptists use all kinds of methods to permit the members, or messengers to record their votes on any issue or election, with each person getting one vote, of course, as in any true democracy.

Usually a moderator will simply call for an "uplifted hand" for and against, and a majority count of hands on either side declares a majority winner in the election at hand. Again, he might request that all for say "aye," and against say "nay," and judge a winner on the basis of volume. Then, on other occasions he may ask all for "to stand," count them, set them down, then have all against "to stand," followed by another count, with a simple majority winning out. Sometimes, when complications may be involved, the moderator will call for a secret ballot, using either blank pieces of paper or a pre-prepared computer ballot, as in large conventions. And Baptists can also choose to elect by "unanimous consent," with no two-way voting.

There may be many other ways, too, for Baptists are

free to "do it like they please," but I saw at least one other way yet at an associational election of officers up in the West Virginia Panhandle at Calvary Church in Follansbee when I attended the annual meeting of the Upper Ohio Valley Association - a small association of only 5 churches, but much alive and kicking up dust like forty along the wet Ohio. There was a real spirit of unity, fellowship, and comradery throughout the meeting.

This was especially evident when it came time for election of officers for the coming year. Moderator, Reverend Pat Brock, pastor in Weirton, called for nominations from the floor for a moderator.

A brother promptly rose and nominated Brock to continue in the role, and someone else just as promptly moved that all nominations be closed. The vice-moderator had moved to another state during the year, so Brock was put into a parliamentary bind to find someone to moderate his own election. Finally, with the consent of the body, he asked the pastor of the local church to moderate things - and he sat down.

That jolly pastor took over immediately and seemed to enjoy his unexpected honor. He said strongly, "Now, all of you in favor of making the wise move of re-electing this good brother as our moderator for the next year say 'Amen.'" He paused, smiled, cocked an ear and listened to the forthcoming Amens. Then he straightened, assumed a stern stance, and said clearly, "Now, all of you opposed to the sorry maneuver of re-electing the rascal say 'Boo!'"

It worked, for the good brother was duly installed for another year's service!

THE BEST

Conclusions are things to be jumped at on the basis of given evidence. But often the evidence can be deceiving, and the hasty jump to a conclusion can be one of vast ego-smashing proportions where you land "flat on your face with mud in your eye." I'm a hasty leaper, so I've had enough mud in my eye to give beauty baths to Cleopatra for a month, with enough left over for a medium sized pig to have a happy fling.

I particularly recall an incident of this nature which occurred while I was Associational Missionary in the Burlington area. My phone rang one early morning, and I

immediately recognized the voice of one of the good ladies in a large Burlington Church - one who was especially good with young people in church work. She talked about young people that morning.

"Brother, Wilkie," she said, "you've been in our church many times, of course, and are familiar with our programs."

"Yes," I replied, "and I enjoy it every time - a great church."

"Well, she continued unabated, "you've noticed the fine young people we have by the scores."

"Oh, sure - I've never seen so many enthusiastic young people in one church, and you, especially, are to be congratulated for the excellent job you're doing with them."

"Well, we're not doing enough. We still have so many who are inactive and unenlisted."

"It's difficult to be 100% in anything, I guess," I stated.

"We're certainly going to try to make it 100% here in our church. We're planning a big affair that we hope and trust will reach every young person in our church," she revealed.

"What's that? Sounds interesting," I said, beginning to wonder. I was already in the mood to say "yes" to anything she asked for me to do, and was anxious to find out what it was.

"It's a Young People's Banquet that's going to be the biggest thing in the history of our church. We've already leased the high school cafeteria for the affair, got caterers, professional decorators, and everything. It will be long dresses for the girls and bow ties for the boys - first class all the way. We really want to make a lasting impression on every young person in our church."

"Great!" I enthused, "I love young people's banquets."

"Well, this one has just got to be the best ever held," she insisted strongly. "They must never forget it, especially those who need enlisting and renewal."

"You can do it, I'm sure," I encouraged.

"And the program must be tops in everything - music, testimonies, prayers, and especially in the inspirational speaker for the occasion. We've got to have the best, deepest, most rousing speech ever delivered to a group of eager young people, you understand, Brother Wilkie."

"Oh, yes, I do," I assured her confidently, searching

my busy, blowed-up brain for my best speech for young people, and practically settling for one based on some verses in Ecclesiastes.

"It's got to be the very best now - tops in every way," she pressed.

"I understand," I said smugly, leaning back.

"Is your wife there!"

SOUR NOTES

Back in the Spring of 1941, when I was a budding senior at Wake Forest College, North Henderson Baptist Church became the second church to call me as its pastor - Pleasant Grove Church in Nash County being the first merciful one to do so.

In my early, youthful ministry I got a lot of foolish notions and made a lot of silly mistakes, typical of headstrong youth in any area, I guess. But the most foolish notion and silliest mistake came early at North Henderson when I got the notion I could sing and made the mistake of trying it.

When I came to them they were in the midst of a big drive for Sunday School attendance and had set a challenging goal, far beyond anything they had ever done. So to bolster and aid the campaign, I used that old promotional cliché, "If you folks will get busy and reach that goal, I'll sing a solo."

The third Sunday I was there they reached and surpassed the goal. Immediately, people began jumping up all over the church in great glee, saying, "Start singing, Brother Wilkie!"

I was caught off guard, totally unprepared, so I said, "Come back tonight, folks, and I'll have that solo ready." With quickening pulse, I suddenly realized that I had really stuck a big foot in my sagging mouth, for the only singing I'd ever done was in the bathtub - and even then, the water would run out - and I was one up on the fellow who said he "couldn't carry a tune in a bucket" - I didn't even have a bucket!

But I got out behind a farmer's tobacco barn that afternoon and practiced the hymn I had learned recently at a religious assembly, the beautiful "Oh, Jesus, I Have Promised." Some cows lolling in the shade nearby didn't make it through the first verse before they rose and took

back to the boiling sun, looking back at me occasionally with big, rolling, puzzled moon eyes. I should have taken a cue right there, I guess, but I practiced right on, despite the fact that I didn't know a music note from one of those cow's left ear - not knowing whether I had it "right" or not.

The little church was packed out that night to hear the new preacher sing. I put it off as long as possible - prayed overly long, made extended announcements, sang extra congregational songs, and took two offerings - but eventually had to get at it.

I hauled off with youthful, gawky gusto, and shakily bellowed out all four stanzas of "Oh, Jesus, I Have Promised," and ended sweating like a treed coon, but feeling right proud that I had completed the project without puncturing a tonsil.

But out in the vestibule, after most of the folks had gone, an old deacon, Dave Stokes, cornered me and said firmly, "You're new here and don't know these mill folks like I do. So, for the sake of your future ministry here, Brother Wilkie, I don't know what all you might have promised Jesus - that's between you and Him - but I want you to solemnly promise me right here and now that you'll never sing in this church again."

"Let me sing one more song for you," I said wiping sweat.

"What?" he asked.

"The Seven-Fold AMEN!"

CRITTERS AT CHURCH

In 40 years of preaching I've run my theological mouth in over 2,000 church to more than a million folks, I'm sure - and I love "church folks" everywhere. But in these years I've seen a lot of things other than folks put in appearances at church services, often producing interesting, unexpected effects.

For instance, I've already done a column depicting the rail-walking entrances of my cat at services in the Robersonville Church - but a lot of critters other than cats have dropped in on my sermons here and there.

At Marrietta Street Church in Gastonia once I was vividly describing a big, ferocious lion when in ambled the ugliest, long-haired street mutt you ever saw. He stood

poised in the door, then eased down the aisle a ways where he nudged the protruding elbow of a brother sitting on the end of a back pew. The fellow looked down, then with a startled grunt, jumped 40 feet straight up and came down three rows away totally disrupting the service. He said later, "When I glanced down and saw that hairy beast I thought sure as heck that lion had done come after me!"

Down at Pleasant Grove Church in Nash County during my brief pastorate there years ago, I had two unusual intrusions - one by a billy goat that came tromping and ninnying up the steps in search of his owner - and another, which I'll never forget, was a big black horse that got loose from his moorings outside, then came and stuck his head plumb through an opened window, looking for his master and oats. At least he didn't let out with a thunderous neigh - just snorted a time or two, but loud enough to wake up four babies and two deacons.

And at a church I'll not name, something occurred during my sermon that really "raised the roof." A little ole mouse came scampering across the rail of the choir loft in front of the choir, and in the midst of the wild scrambling, the lead soprano hit a high note she didn't know she had. She later tried opera.

Another choir disturbance happened at Sandy Creek Church near Louisburg. A fat black and red wasp decided he wanted a seat in the choir and most of the members were willing to accommodate him, especially one squeamish girl who kept jumping, squealing and swatting. I merely bowed my head and prayed aloud, "Just send a couple more, Lord, to keep 'em awake during my sermon."

And at the North Henderson Church, early in my career, I was preaching away one summer night, looking to the left, when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, something horrendous came zooming like a jet straight at my head from the right. Instinctively, I jumped back, tripped and plopped flat on my back behind the pulpit stand.

Lying there I could still hear strange, whirring noises, so I just got up onto my hands and knees, gingerly crawled around the pulpit, looking wide-eyed out, up, and down - while the whole congregation screamed with laughter at the curious sight.

Well, it turned out to be a zinging, blind bat who must have thought I was a juicy bug - or else had one in my thick thatch. But a long-standing member remarked after the service, "That's the first time I ever saw a preacher

down on his knees in our pulpit!"

HOME ON WHEELS

The world is full of quitters - those who can't face the music and stop playing for one reason or another, and the instruments of their lives lie rusting and useless.

On the other hand, there are those determined, ambitious, gritty folks who "keep on keeping on" regardless of what fate and circumstance cast in their paths. They face and overcome every obstacle, ever moving forward and upward under the burden of awesome, back-breaking loads and handicaps.

While at Oak Ridge Church near Icard over a year ago, I came across a graphic illustration of perseverance and grit under the most adverse circumstances. In company with the fine pastor, I visited in the humble home of Miss Tessie Lowman, a life-long member of Oak Ridge Church.

She greeted us with a warm handshake and winning smile - from a wheel chair - but I soon discovered that the chair was no obstacle to meaningful, productive living, and was no source for self pity and pessimism. Miss Lowman explained how well she got along, despite being confined to the chair, and jokingly referred to it as "my home on wheels." She told me how she did her own cooking and housekeeping from the chair and didn't depend on others in the least. In fact, she served as the neighborhood baby sitter, and looked out for a bunch of lively children about every day, saying, "They are no trouble and I love it. They mind and respect me very well."

Now, I've seen a lot of folks in wheel chairs - nothing unusual about that - but what was so remarkable about Miss Lowman came out when I asked her what produced her confinement to it.

She answered, "Well, I was stricken with polio at the age of three, and have been paralyzed from the waist down ever since."

"My!" I said, taken back as I looked at her grey hair. "Now, I'm plumb curious to know how old you are - if you don't mind."

"Oh, I don't mind," she giggled, "I'm 72."

"Goodness, I came back in utter shock, "that means you've been in a wheel chair for 69 years!"

"That's right - 69 years - right here, and not a

step."

"That must be a record of some sort, surely," I continued in wide-eyed amazement, "my stars alive, just how many blooming wheel chairs have you gone through - or worn out - all that time?"

"Oh, I lost count of that fact, I reckon, for there have been so many--but none ever wore me out!"

The plucky Miss Lowman is the epitomy of a tenacious, inflexible hen I read about somewhere long ago that belonged to a simple country rube who tried to defeat her rising maternal instincts when, as he reported, "She got sotting on her mind - just sot all day every day - and wouldn't let me have her eggs, and I was getting mighty hungry."

He was determined "to unsot" her, and one frustrating maneuver he tried was to sprinkle long, sharp thorns in the nest between the eggs - making sure dozens of spiny points were sticking up to discourage any easy, comfortable sotting.

But he sadly reported, "That dern stubborn ole hen of mine just hopped up on that nest and done gone and stood up to sot!"

SLEEPY TIME

Sleeping pills are big business in this country. Billions of them are sold to help millions of restless, nervous, tired Americans get "a good night's sleep."

Well, sleeping has never been one of my major problems, and is at least one area in which I excel. In fact, I'm a pure expert on it. I can konk out under most any circumstances - noise, storms, lights, voices, traffic, nagging, conscience, sermons - makes no difference. And once I'm out, it takes a whack on the hairy gourd with a ball bat to bring me back to reality. I sleep deep.

In Robersonville once I slept through a rousing tornado - the violent winds flattened a big tobacco warehouse down town, toppled the chimney on our house, ripped every window screen all around, took off half the shingles, uprooted a couple of trees - and while the wife was up running about wildly closing things, I dreamed on like a babe, not even twitching a finger. She whacked me with that bat early the next morning and disgustingly informed me on what I had missed. I told her I would have

fainted if I had been awake, so what difference did it make?

I learned early how to induce sleep under difficult circumstances, having been reared in the Baptist Children's Home. We had a cottage matron who insisted on absolute quiet and slumber when all of us 45 boys went upstairs for bed - but she seldom got them, naturally. Consequently, she'd march the noise-making culprits, which always included me, down the stairs in their B.V.D.s, herd them into the big study hall, and line them up facing a wall - standing on one foot, hands at the side. A hand touched to the wall or the other foot to the floor brought a stinging thrack on the bare legs from a long switch. We soon lost our noise-making incentives under those adverse conditions.

But I learned to lock my left knee, fold my arms across my chest, tuck up my right foot, bow my head, and go sound to sleep standing up - like a drowsy, oat-filled mule in his cozy stall. She had to switch me to wake me up to go back to bed. I can preach an hour-long sermon today standing on my left foot!

While a college student, late one night on the short bus ride from Raleigh to Wake Forest, I went to sleep on a back seat, woke up somewhere in the hinterlands of Virginia, and missed a whole day's classes - but I also slept through a lot on classes even when I did make them. It shows today.

And once I even passed out while sitting on the rostrum during a church service. Blessed slumber overtook my tired body during the exceptionally long "Pastoral Prayer" - I went out during his extended plea for Divine help for all the sick and needy in the community and world - the last thing I remembered was a plea on behalf of some deacon's gall bladder, and the rest of the sick had to suffer without my sympathy. I was long gone.

And I'd be asleep to this day, I guess, if, following the prayer, the big congregation hadn't sung "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus" real vigorously, and I woke up with a theological jerk in time to participate in the offering and to preach on a text from Isaiah 60:1 - "Arise, Shine: for Thy Light Is Come." I arose, all right - but I never did get the lights on real good!

In four years of working in the mountains during the late fifties some of my most fruitful and happy hours were spent over at Cherokee among Indian Baptist friends and churches - in surveys, study courses, schools of missions, enlargement campaigns, pulpit supply, deacon ordinations, revivals - and just plain visiting around "gawking, gabbing and grabbing" like any normal tourist.

At many of their church dinners, which they loved to spread full and free, I even learned to love and relish genuine "bean bread," plain, pasty corn meal, jabbed full of large navy beans, wrapped in certain kinds of leaves, or corn shucks, and boiled to taste - until the beans were done, anyhow, ending up with a steaming round ball the size of your fist. It added real weight to your lower stomach!

One year, under the planning and direction of Missionary J. D. Griffin and pastor Bo Parris, I had the rare privilege of doing the preaching in their annual "Réserve-Wide Revival" held that year at the Yellow Hill Baptist Church. They came from all over the Reservation, and the stone church was packed and running over each night with worshipping, singing, praying Indians - and I'll never forget the unique experience, though they probably have long since forgotten me.

They could really "lift the roof" with enthusiastic singing and "reach the heavens" with powerful praying - during which they knelt, all the preachers coming to the rostrum to lead, and each person offering his own prayer aloud, preachers and congregation - at the same time - the older ones fervently praying in Cherokee and the younger ones in English, which might have sounded like unblended gibberish to an outsider, but their prayers went all the way - I could see it in their radiant faces. Their praying really revved up a preacher!

They closed out the week by giving my family a surprise "Indian Shower," wherein we were lined up at the front - me, the wife, and three children - and literally showered with gifts from every quarter as they came forth individually and graciously presented them - belts, beads, bracelets, dolls, dishes, sandals, scarves, blow gun, and over a dozen beautiful, hand-woven baskets of every size and shape, which we still have and treasure. One old, bent Indian granny even brought us two gallon jars of freshly picked, capped and cleaned, red-ripe wild strawberries,

representing a lot of hard labor on her part - and gobs of out-of-this-world jam and jelly later.

But I especially recall one night as I was preaching along, I glanced at my watch and said, "My, it's getting late - I'll just sum up things in a nutshell."

At the door after services as I stood shaking hands, one robust, 12-year-old Indian lad took my hand and uttered with an exhaustive sigh, "Brother Wilkie, that sure was one more long hard nutshell!"

I had worn him plumb out and slam down to a frazzle -- maybe he still remembers me!

A REAL BELIEVER

Time was decades ago when for tramps, beggars, the needy, and the not so needy, the best "hand-out" in town was always at the preacher's house. The preacher had the reputation of being a "soft touch," and a steady stream of outstretched hands was always at his door. The situation is not so bad today, as now everybody in need just knocks on the government's door, and leaves the preacher alone.

While at Robersonville as a young pastor I was among the soft touches and could be moved by most any kind of woeful tale - and you could really hear some doozies from a lot of folks who wanted something - money, food, medicine, transportation, clothes, or whatnot.

But I had one particular needy, suffering soul who was almost a regular customer - seems he would get a bad case of pleurisy as regularly as clockwork, become totally incapacitated, unable to work if he ever did, and "Preacher, I'm about to starve and am gonna die if I don't soon eat." He'd double up in supposed agonizing pain, hold his side with both hands, grimace terribly, totter on his feet, and look like he was going to die right there on my porch.

After my faithful handout, his parting words always were, "Bless you, preacher - I have some biddies coming along and I'll throw a fat hen over your back fence one day before long." I never saw so much as a feather, of course, in over two years.

I'd tell my wife, "That fellow surely is a good actor - he ought to go to Hollywood. Absolutely nothing on this earth could be as bad as he makes it out - pleurisy, or anything else." I was so blooming young and healthy at the

time, I didn't even know what pleurisy was!

Years later, while living up in Canton, I went to Fries, Virginia, for a week's revival. About the middle of the week I began having a few sharp pains in my left side, but attributed it to too much "revival eating," and thought nothing of them. But they got progressively worse, and by the time I got ready to drive home at the week's end I was in mortal agony, and just barely made it back to Canton.

I hit the bed pronto, by this time being whiter than the sheets on it, and desperately gasping for every precious breath. My wife, being a musician, immediately recognized the doloroso overtones of my pitiful groaning and immediately called Dr. Boyd Owens, an old Wake Forest College mate. When he came in, I was writhing like I was in the last death throes, and he pilled and shot me with everything in his black bag, and sent out for more.

I couldn't budge an inch for four solid days - couldn't breathe - couldn't cough - couldn't eat - couldn't turn over--worse dang stuff I ever had in my born life - pleurisy! I still hurt in that spot over twenty years later. I'll never get over it completely.

And one of these days yet, I'm gonna get me a fat hen and pitch over some neighbor's fence out of pure deference to that suffering guy in Robersonville who was telling the truth about pleurisy. In fact, with all his words and maneuvers, he didn't tell the half of it. I'll even throw over a couple of fried eggs for good measure. Pleurisy is bad, bad stuff, believe me!

THE PAYOFF

It would be difficult to argue very much with the old cliché that "experience is the best teacher," for its hard lessons often result in drastic changes in attitudes, responses, and life styles. Experience has resulted in more reformation than Martin Luther ever brought about in his day.

A generation ago I traveled up to Caldwell County to deliver a missions sermon in the lively Dudley Shoals Baptist Church during a World Mission Conference. I arrived just a few minutes before the morning service was to begin and the sprawling, paved parking lot was already jammed with cars - the Dudley Shoal folks really attend church services, and the spacious building was "crammed to

the rafters." I love to see full church houses!

The only space available in the lot was a small area around a big, tall, creosoted light pole smack-dab in the middle of the lot. I carefully eased my car right up against it, taking note of the strange sight of that pole with its wires running out in every direction over the lot.

After services, during dinner with the pastor, I inquired about it, asking, "Just why did you folks leave that big, ugly pole right in the middle of the lot when you paved it - looks funny to me, as well as hazardous?"

"Well," he replied with a smile and a sigh, "all of that came up when we were discussing the matter of clearing and paving the lot. It would have been a big added expense to have it moved and all the wires relocated. One of our practical, money-wise deacons forcefully persuaded the church to leave it, saying it would be a waste of the Lord's good money that could be used better elsewhere - and adding strongly that anyone who couldn't see a great big light pole was too blind to have a driver's license in the first place!"

Ten years later I went back to Dudley Shoals for an Associational meeting. The lot was clear - no pole and no wires - just a clear, even sea of parked cars.

Seems that the practical deacon was a faithful member of the community's volunteer fire department, never missing a fire. The loud fire gong went off one foggy Sunday morning right in the middle of church services. Along with several others, the fireman deacon jumped up in immediate response, ran outside, rushed headlong to his car, practically dove in under the wheel, frantically started it, threw gears into reverse and gunned backwards with a mighty thrust -- smack-ka-slam right into that light pole, knocked it from its moorings, and left the rear of his new car looking like it had been through the presses at a Scranton steel mill. A wrecker had to be called to divorce the union between his car and that pole. He missed the fire - which turned out to be a false alarm!

At the very next business meeting, he promptly rose with no lost motion, and said in a stern, demanding voice, "Folks, I want that dangling, dangerous light pole moved from the middle of our parking lot - across the street plumb off our property - and send the whole bill to me!"

Experience certainly got in itsicks on that one!

In my senior year at Wake Forest College (1940-41), my good friend and benefactor, Dr. Norfleet Gardner, pastor of the big First Baptist Church in downtown Henderson, recommended me to the North Henderson Church as a prospective pastor. Dr. Gardner had been pastor of the Mills Home Church in Thomasville when I entered the Children's Home in 1927, so he knew me from back when and beyond that. Of course, he took a chance with his reputation in recommending a 20-year-old, inexperienced boneyard for a pastorate!

Anyway, the good folks at North Henderson followed up, contacted, interviewed me, and had me over one Wednesday night for a "trial sermon," with the usual small "prayer meeting" group on hand. But they issued a call and I joyfully accepted. My first sermon to the full church in a morning service was set for two weeks away, as they just had preaching every other Sunday at that time.

In that interim, I went on a picnic with the girl friend from Meredith College down in Pullen Park in Raleigh, along with several other courting couples. We sat on a hill overlooking the lake, leaning back against a big tree, eating, gabbing, and enjoying the occasion.

That stinking tree was covered with poison oak, which I didn't notice, for I was all eyes for the girl friend and nothing else. I inadvertently rubbed that juicy stuff all over me, and "it ate me up" from head to toe - which it always does. I ended up with my fingers swollen together, eyes puffed to where I could barely see, cheeks blown out like a balloon, ear lobes distorted out of shape, fat lips protruding like fried sausages, and my whole head a mass of itchy blisters - and I had to cut my hair down to a stubble to treat it. I looked like some mis-shapened ogre straight out of Grimm's Fairy Tales.

But I wasn't about to miss my first sermon as the new pastor of North Henderson Church - and I went. The church was packed out with folks on hand to hear and see the new pastor - and I'd be afraid to this day to ask them just what they thought they were hearing and seeing. It is said that first impressions are the most lasting. I hope not!

That afternoon I walked down to Dr. Gardner's house for a visit - and to thank him. He opened the door, took one horrified look, promptly slammed it, put a hand to his brow and cried, "Oh, my goodness, what have I done to those

poor folks at North Henderson?" On the way back, as I walked along, an ambulance stopped and offered to take me to the hospital, but I declined. I was one sickly mess, all right.

I was back at North Henderson just a couple of years ago for a Homecoming sermon. After services, during dinner on the grounds, a few of the old-timers from those early days were gathered around me, and we were reminiscing about this and that, laughing heartily, though not many were left after over 40 years.

One old man shook my hand and said enthusiastically, "Sure is good to see you again, Brother Wilkie, after all these long years, but you sure have changed --you looked better with the poison oak!"

FIRST THINGS FIRST

In another column I described how I got off to a bad start as the new pastor of North Henderson Church in 1941 when I went for my first sermon all wrapped up with a horrendous case of poison oak. Well, I went from North Henderson to Robersonville in May, 1943, and I didn't get off to a very good start with those good Martin County folks, either.

My young bride and I (I was young, too, of course!) moved our two pieces of used furniture into the cavernous pastorium at Robersonville, and got about the business of setting up our first real home together - we had lived the first months of our marriage in a two-room, up-stairs, furnished apartment.

They had replaced some big floor beams under the house, and the old rotted beams were piled in a little fenced-in area at the back by the garage. One morning in mid-week, Nancy walked the three blocks to town - we didn't have a car at that time - in search of a beauty parlor so she could look extra pretty for our first service at the church. I got a big ax and started in on those beams for firewood.

A thin wire clothes line was stretched across the area from the garage to the fence on the other side, but I took no note of it as I vigorously lit into the beams with swinging ax, using straight up and down overhead blows. However, I pretty soon took note of that wire with the ax. It bounded straight back and struck me a blow with the

flat, blunt end in mid-forehead that knocked me plumb into dizzy limbo, opened up a hole in my noggin from which gushed blood like a Roman fountain - down my face and all over my clothes, and I immediately became one woozy, bloody mess. I felt of my forehead and thought all my brains were gonna come outta that hole.

Leaving a trail of blood everywhere, I rushed into the bathroom, took one look at the gory sight in the mirror, and decided I needed some help. I rushed over to my new neighbor, Heber Baker, who took one look, ran to his car as I stripped off my shirt and wrapped it around my head to staunch the blood flow and to keep from messing up his car. He got down to Dr. Vernon Ward's office in nothing flat - and a worried Nancy got there later, after seeing the blood trails at home.

It turned out to be mostly a thin flesh wound about three inches long which Dr. Ward expertly cleaned, sewed up, and sent me back home to ache and recuperate. I'm glad that ax didn't turn in my hand and strike me with the cutting edge - that would have been a different tale!

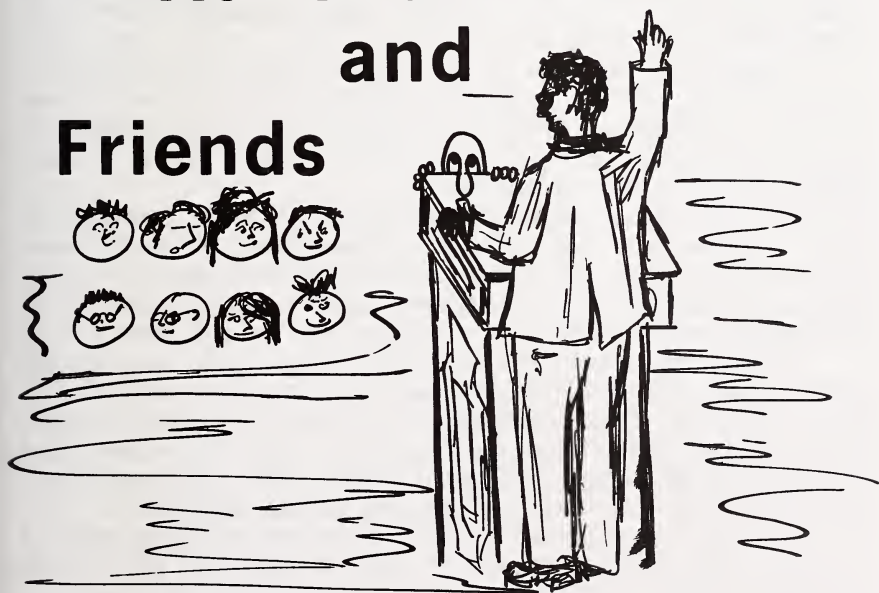
Anyway, when I stood for my first sermon at Robersonville, the puzzled people gazed up at their new pastor, with his red, swollen, bandaged head, and wondered what in the world they had called.

However, I tried to make the most of the embarrassing situation by assuring them, "Now, don't get too upset, good people, when you look at me - all is well. I just decided that before I set in working on all you folks that I'd set a good example and knock the devil outta my own self first!"

JUST LOOKIN' AROUND

At Preachers
and

Friends



SKIN AND BONES

Rev. Ralph N. Culler, longtime pastor of several churches in North Carolina, such as Rose Hill, has always been one of my best cronies and companions over the years, though our get-togethers have been scattered and infrequent. After retirement, he served a mission church at Brandywine, West Virginia, for a couple of years, then retired again to his home in Franklinton. Ralph and I have a lot in common, and get along like the two proverbial "peas in a pod."

Well, for one thing, we're both now old and ugly--and, years ago, when we first met, we were young and ugly. We'll both die in that ungainly state, I'm sure.

And we love to play golf, equally as bad, though he has always gotten a little frustrated most of the time because he plays worse than I do, and has trouble coming out ahead of me on any given day--but he tries hard and fusses a lot. Of course, if he ever finds a way to start coming out ahead of me, then our friendship is at an end!

Also, each of us has a pretty, smart, and talented wife, and friends marvel and ask them why they married us, and we don't try to find any answers for that situation--just enjoy.

Neither of us, again, can preach worth a lick, but we have enjoyed all the opportunities the Good Lord has given us to do so down through the decades--and I must admit, he out-preaches me, and if he's bad to start with, I don't know what that says about me!

But the area in which we have the most commonality and likeness is the wizened appearance of our gaunt physical frames. It looks as if the creator ran out of meat when He sent our skeletons down to occupy on earth, and neither of us found very much after we got here.

We've threatened to use each other for tees during our rounds of golf and thus save "two cents a stob." In fact, I tried standing him on his head for that purpose last summer, but the rascal couldn't keep his shaky feet together long enough to hold the ball for a decent shot, so I had to go back to the regular wooden device.

I like to describe my bony condition by quoting a little rhyme I read somewhere years ago, for it fits my situation perfectly:

There once was a fellow so skinny
 He could hardly get his breath -
 He fell through a hole in the seat of his pants,
 And choked his fool self to death!

I've managed to survive holey britches through the years by marrying a Home Economics teacher who really knows how to sew--though I read a statement in "Grit" recently that "Whatsoever a mother sewth, a son doth rip"--and I'm sure the same holds true for sewing wives and ripping husbands.

However, Ralph tops all of that by a mile, and wins going away. In depicting his own skeletine appearance, he says sadly, "When I was growing up, I was so skinny that my mama had to tie knots in my legs to make it look like I had knees."

That's skinny, folks!

BIG FOOT

One of my fine neighbors in the block just behind me is the Rev. Bailey Elmore, pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church, which is located about two miles out of Kinston on the Greenville highway. He has pastored in other places about the state, such as Roanoke Rapids, Mount Airy and Deep Run, but is a native of this area and came "back home" when he took the Calvary Church several years ago.

Along with his other concerned neighbors, church members and friends, I've been trying to cheer him up lately for he has really been in a touchy, painful state for several months, brought about by a seriously injured back. He has been so physically active all his life--working, gardening, building, and hunting--that the stiff immobility produced by the bad back is about to kill him--as it would me too, I'm sure, so he has my full sympathy.

He got into the poor condition when he made a slip while on a deer hunting trek up near Mount Airy--out of a tree, no less--not on ice or snow. While coming down from his cold, damp "deer roost" in the tree, after a day of deerlessness, he fell several feet, hit on his back, and "things popped like a barrel of firecrackers" all over the place. He was hurt!

He laid there for hours until proper help could come and get him to the hospital in Mount Airy, then to Baptist

Hospital in Winston-Salem, where he spent several long, painful, expensive weeks--underwent an operation, and ended up in a body cast from waist to neck--which is in two removeable halves, so he doesn't have to spend all his time in it, thankfully. He's making much progress now, and by the time you read this will probably be back in high gear.

But Bailey vows and declares that sometimes in the future you may accidentally find him "up the creek," or "up in the air," or "up in arms," but it'll be a blue coon's age before you find him "up a tree"--any kind, anywhere, deer or no deer!

And his aching back didn't dull his down-to-earth sense of humor. He made my toes curl up in pure glee when he told me about the first time he met his future father-in-law back when he was courting his pert wife, Barbara. He was nervous and scared.

In those young days he was tall, lean and gaunt--a 6 foot plus pile of brown bones that looked like a flag pole on a windless day, weighing only a measley 140 pounds. However, his bones rested on good foundations; for his huge, oversized feet made him look as if he were plodding along on snow shoes. They really stuck out and were sticking out there like a sore thumb as he sat on the couch in Barbara's home waiting for her father to enter.

The father entered the room and Bailey was so frozen he couldn't even rise to greet him, but just sat there with those feet hanging out on the living room rug. The father stood looking him over very carefully, up and down, with his bulging eyes finally honing in on Bailey's whopping feet, saying with awe in his voice, "Son, if you ever decide to shoot them things, I'd sure like to get myself a good mess of spareribs!"

RUMBLING ALONG

Since 1945 I've been in and out of the Pollocksville Baptist Church for this and that and the other--pulpit supply, study courses, mission conferences, revivals, and just plain visiting. Beginning with the late Albert Lamm in '45, I've known, fellowshiped and worked with a succession of good pastors at the church, and have seen the situation progress from a small wood building to the present modern brick plant and matching, nearby pastorium,

along with substantial increases in membership and substance.

Not long ago the church called a new pastor, and at the first opportunity I hied off down there on a Sunday morning to meet and hear him, as I didn't want Pollocksville to have a pastor I didn't know.

He is the Rev. Michael L. Lovette, a native of Lawton, Oklahoma, who came to school at Southeastern Seminary seven years ago, along with his Oklahoma wife, and decided to remain in North Carolina, especially in light of the call from Pollocksville--that made it easy to forget Lawton. He now has a North Carolina born child, too, so he's getting Tar Heel better all the time.

After services, young Michael and I hit it off in fine fashion, and I now have a new pastor friend, indeed. It turned out that in 1950 I had held a revival in Cookie Town Baptist Church south of Lawton right in his home territory, about the time he was born. During that week the wife and I, along with our two-year-old son, had spent our first frantic night in a storm cellar trying to escape tornadoes, tarantulas, red ants, scorpions, channel catfish, Baptists, and all that other funny stuff they have in Oklahoma.

But I also enjoyed him during the church services, and was highly impressed with his talents. Using the text, "Be Still and Know That I am God," for a launching pad, he preached a good, unusual, powerful sermon on "Silence." In addition to the good that comes from silence, such as in deep meditation, he also emphasized the bad, saying it was sometimes frightening and destructive, as when a married couple go silent on each other and fail to communicate.

As an illustration of what silence can be and do, he took out his watch, and asked the congregation to be perfectly still for just 10 seconds. Everything got deathly silent, with even the children ceasing their squirming, wriggling and turning of hymnal pages, while a couple of teenagers straightened and quit their whispering for a spell. It was almost eerie--not a sound or movement, apparently.

Then Michael asked, "Well, did you hear anything during that 10 seconds of dead silence? I don't guess it was absolute dead silence, as that is difficult to achieve, however, for while all was quiet just now I heard the soft humming of the electric organ over there, and the

ticking of my watch here, and the breathing of the choir behind me." He paused, then with a sly grin, added, "And I must admit that I also heard the sad rumblings of my hungry stomach!"

There never will be absolute silence as long as a Baptist preacher's stomach is on hand.

MULE DANCE

West Virginia Southern Baptist men hold an annual two-day retreat at Cedar Lakes State Park near Ripley, featured by much fervent praying, warm fellowship, bounteous food, moving testimonies, and powerful preaching.

On hand this year were several men from North Carolina who had done mission work in West Virginia, mostly construction work, and had been invited up to give their testimonies on the benefits of laymen involved in real, personal missions. Among them was Rev. George Knight, pastor of the Delco Baptist Church, who had pitched in with the laymen and did his share of the work, despite a bad heart.

In trying to illustrate how deeply and pleasantly he had enjoyed the work and how he had anticipated the high privilege of giving his testimony at the retreat, he told of a certain fellow in Texas who was suddenly placed in a most "anticipatory position."

This old Texas grandpappy was out one hot day plowing his cotton field, trudging along behind a slow-moving, sweating, flop-eared Texas mule. The aged farmer was hatless, dressed in loose overalls, with a dirty bandana draped about his neck. He paused at the end of a row to rest a bit on the plow handles and to wipe his brow with the bandana. The old mule neighed his appreciation for the pause.

A young, brash, brightly-dressed urban cowboy came driving by in his flashy sports car, espied the resting farmer, and decided he'd have some fun at the old geezer's expense. He stopped the car, and approached the grandpa, who eyed him curiously.

The cowboy drew his long shiny six-shooter from his beaded belt, pointed it at the surprised farmer, and asked, "You ever danced in your life, old man?"

"Naw," he replied, "ain't had time fer thet

foolishness."

"Well, let's see if you can't learn how, old fellow," came back the cowboy, and began shooting at the farmer's feet, kicking up dust--and the stiff grandpa started kicking up some dust, too, trying frantically to dodge bullets and hold onto his bucking mule at the same time. He ended up doing quite a fancy, impromptu dance, accompanied by the howls and snorts of the highly entertained cowboy.

The fellow gave out of bullets and busied himself with reloading for some more fun, taking his eye off the man as he looked down to his reloading business.

In that interim, the wheezing farmer reached up to a saddle bag on the mule and quietly came down with a long object--and when the cowboy finally looked up, he found himself staring straight down both barrels of a 12-gauge shot gun--right at his nose. He gulped, did a double-take, dropped his six-shooter, and stepped back as his eyes widened in utter surprise--and pure terror.

"Ya ever kissed a big, flop-eared, Texas plow mule in yer life, young feller?" quizzed the grim farmer.

"Never--never, sir," stammered the rhinestone cowboy, "but I assure you, sir, that I'm really looking forward to the happy experience!"

HOT TIME

When we say a fellow is "in hot water," we mean that his misdeeds have finally caught up with him and he's in for a bad time. But not always, for a man can get in that position without being a miscreant by being the innocent victim of circumstances.

Such was the case one time for Rev. Charles H. Wellons, witty pastor of the Providence Baptist Church at Shawboro. Charles is a native of Kinston, a product of the Baptist Church and has been in Shawboro for more than a generation, following brief pastorates in the fifties at Bethel Church in Lenoir County and Peachtree Church in Nash County, following college and seminary days.

He has been in almost ministerial hibernation during these years, for Shawboro is located in the extreme southeastern section of the state below Elizabeth City in Currituck County, and you almost have to have a compass and weather vane to locate it and really be wanting to go

there to go there! But Charles has enjoyed a long and successful ministry at the Providence Church, having developed expertise in clockmaking and woodworking, as well as sermonizing and baptizing.

And it was at a baptizing that Charles got into that hot water--literally. He scheduled a baptizing one cold Sunday morning to take place at the conclusion of the regular sermon and service. The covered pool, fronted by a thick curtain, had been filled on Saturday, with the electric heating element and thermostat set to run long enough to "take the chill off the water."

However, the thermostat jammed or malfunctioned, and the heating element ran full blast all night and right on through the church service, as no one checked it, taking for granted that things were normal and on schedule.

Consequently, near the close of his sermon when the deacons moved quietly to uncover and uncurtain the pool, things loomed up suddenly like one of those torrid bubbling springs at Yellowstone Park and was hot enough for a hog scalding and scraping--wisps of steam rose from the boiling water and hovered about like a haunted swamp bathed in eerie morning mist. Charles would have had to have an asbestos suit to survive a baptizing in that steaming pool, and it certainly was hot enough to take the pure hide off the toughest of sinners. The congregation stirred and tittered like a tree full of squirrels at the misty sight.

Well, the stunned but innovative Charles stopped preaching, quieted things down and finally directed the deacons to rush to the ice plant downtown, bring large hunks of ice and try to cool off things a bit while he delayed the baptizing by more preaching and singing. They rushed to do his bidding and by the time they got back with the ice, Charles was ready for the baptizing for he had about preached, sung, and prayed plumb out.

Well, the ice did the trick, and Charles didn't end up in extremely hot water, but it was still warm enough until he said he was mighty tempted to end the service by having the congregation to sing, "There'll Be A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight," but settled for "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow" instead!

A WIDE VIEW

Camerron Norris is a business man down east in the odoriferous paper mill town of Riegelwood. He's also an active layman in the Riegelwood Baptist Church--and far beyond the church, for he stays busy in various Laymen's Witnessing Campaigns anywhere, anytime, giving freely of his time, money, and talents. Among his latest jaunts have been trips to West Virginia where, along with dozens of others from North Carolina, he has been involved in mission and construction work at Kingwood and Mineral Wells.

Now, Camerron is what I call a "big Baptist" of the first order--anyway you want to look at it. His concerned heart is big enough to hold the whole world, and his expansive body is big enough to shade a half-grown elephant. When I shake hands with him it looks like a fingernail file tangling with a sledge hammer. If he weren't on my side in anything--I'd quit!

While growing up to his present huge proportions, he was also a member of a huge family, and he loves to talk about his innovative dad, who must have been some character, indeed, and more fun than eating watermelon and chasing tadpoles, and Camerron was bound to have inherited his own sense of humor and love of adventure from his dad.

The father, with the help of a faithful mother, reared that large family on a farm just out of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and spent his life in that area, never doing much traveling. He just stuck to the sand and mules along the coast--in the days long before all those present modern developments came along to clutter up things.

But Camerron relates that one day his dad called the family together and told them it was time he widened his horizons and saw a little more of the world before he died. He announced his intentions to walk up to Wilmington, North Carolina, the nearest big city, and see how city folks lived and inspect that portion of the wide world. It was about 40 miles straight up the coast to Wilmington. He packed a knapsack with food--beans, boiled potatoes, corn bread, hard tack--and took off at dawn, with the anxious family wishing him well, and warning him "not to walk off the edge of the world."

He was gone for two days and nights, and came dragging in early on the third morning, looking like he

had just returned from a battlefield in the Civil War. He was limping badly.

"How was Wilmington, Daddy?" asked the children, crowding around him, each vying for his attention, "Did you see the world?"

He sighed heavily and answered wearily, "Didn't get to Wilmington. I walked and walked until dark--got scared of stepping on snakes, and made camp. The next morning, it seemed to me I had already walked my legs down to nubs, so I decided to come back home--and I tell you one thing, children--if the world is as big in the other direction as it is toward Wilmington, it's one-whale-of-a-place!"

SIGHT UNSEEN

Dr. Randolph "Denny" Spear, Jr., Head Chaplain for Day's Inn, Inc., working out of Chamblee, Georgia, has sired and reared six children. So far, with a good mother's help, they have managed to survive "life without father."

Back when they all were young, they agitated Denny for a swimming pool like all the neighbors had and enjoyed. Said Denny, counting his pennies, "We'll just have to plant one and see what happens." He dug a little depression in the garden, ringed it about, and told the kids, "Now, you'll have to take care of it and tend it."

It rained that night and the next morning the depression was full of water. "Now see, children," said Denny, "the baby pool has blossomed forth." But things got dry, and the children got busy with other things, and added Denny, "As a result, the pool died, and we never did get a pool, for that was the only known swimming pool seed in existence!"

"Like father like son"--Denny inherited all this tricky buffonery from his fun-loving dad, who has operated a sporting goods store in Kinston for half a century or more--and still does.

Years ago, a dirty, red-headed, bare-footed type came in and asked Mr. Spear if he had any fish hooks. He kept his assorted hooks in an old 12-hole cup cake baking pan, and brought it out for the lad to inspect. The boy looked them over carefully, then asked, "Do you have any smaller than these?"

"Why sure, son," answered Spear seriously, "in fact, I have some so small you can't even see them." He pointed to an empty tray in the pan, adding, "They really work, for the fish can't see them and get caught real easily. You could nab yourself a real mess of fish with these hooks, son."

"I'll take a nickle's worth of em," said the enthralled lad.

They sold two for a penny, so Spear carefully and laboriously counted out 10 invisible hooks, ceremoniously dropped them into an envelope, sealed it, handed it to the boy, and took his nickle.

He then watched through the window as the boy stood on the curb outside, envelope in hand. The lad looked around, rolling his eyes from side to side to make sure he wasn't observed, then slowly opened the package, ran an index finger down into it, feeling for the hooks--then put two fingers in, running them back and forth. Next, he peered down into it with one eye--finally turning it up and shaking it into his hand. He got down on his knees and felt all around, thinking he had dropped them, then stood and studied the situation. He glanced back toward the store and Spear quickly ducked out of sight.

The boy slowly turned and came back into the store, as Spear retreated back behind the counter, still with a solemn face.

The lad approached, hesitated a moment, held up the empty envelope, then asked anxiously, "Mister, do you suppose I could swap these for a nickle's worth of the next biggest size?"

ALL EARS

Cigar chomping Sam Bundy of Farmville-Greenville has been around a long time --schooling, politicking, and making funny speeches any and everywhere. He is a rare raconteur, indeed, and much in demand for his illustrious tales.

As a young man, years ago, he went to Farmville as principal of the then small, struggling high school. He immediately set about the task of enlarging and improving things.

One thing he wanted was a good football team to represent the school, and a first-rate band to back it up,

neither of which they had, and with little prospects for either. But the impetuous Bundy fired up the whole town and convinced them that they needed both. The citizenry rallied behind him and things really got moving.

A part of the overall project was to raise funds to purchase instruments and uniforms for the proposed band. He organized the people for soliciting, and covered every block in town by definite assignments, as well as out-lying districts.

He did his part by taking a block himself and struck out one afternoon to "work it out." He approached one imposing, white-columned house, surrounded by a neat picket fence, featuring a flower-lined walk and wide front porch. He was sure there was plenty of money inside.

His rap on the large door, after a long wait, produced the appearance of a wee, granny-of-a-woman, looking at him over the rims of her glasses while leaning heavily on a large cane.

Sam introduced himself as the new principal in town, then went into his fund raising spiel. He took several minutes to explain the whole situation, saying how proud the whole town would be at the sight and sound of the first-rate band with its shiny new instruments and colorful new uniforms, and ended by stating, "And I'm sure that you, as an upright, patriotic citizen, would be willing to make a most generous contribution to this worthy project."

She leaned forward on her cane, cupped a hand to her left ear, cocked her head to one side, and asked in a squeaky voice, "Eh, young man, what do you say?"

Well, Sam moved in a step closer, raised his heavy voice an octave and went through the whole she-bang again, strongly repeating his suggestion for a good donation.

She leaned over even further and intoned, "Eh, young man, what is it you're saying?" She stared at him with a blank look.

His next go at it was deliberate, slow, and loud, and she hauled off and "Ehed" him for the third time.

Sam reports that he was young, impatient, and headstrong back then, so he impulsively turned from her and muttered under his breath, "Ah, to Dung-ho with you, you deaf old bat!"

He was halfway down the walk when he heard a loud tapping and high voice crying, "Young man! Young Man!"

He turned and saw the little sister standing on the

very edge of the porch, tapping her cane vigorously.

"Yes?" said Bundy.

She leaned forward, pointed a shaking finger at him, and piped out, "And to pure Dung-ho with you and your dang ole band, too!"

BUILT TO SIZE

Church pulpit stands come in all sizes, shapes and forms, and I've stood behind all kinds here and there. A few are solid, but most of them are hollow, with shelves and doors. The majority of them, in addition to holding up the preacher, serve as catchalls for everything found loose in the church. If you drop, lose, or leave anything in the building, it will probably end up inside the pulpit stand--along with all the other junk already there--old hymnals, worn bibles, out-dated quarterlies, used bulletins, twine, crayons, light cords, plugs, gloves, handkerchiefs, thumb tacks, nails, envelopes, pencils, putty knives, paint cans, beads, scarves, cracked collection plates, and anything else that can be picked up and moved from one place to another. I suppose lazy janitors are the main culprits in the messy matter, as it's much easier to cram something inside the stand, close the doors, and forget about it.

I've accidentally bumped the loose doors with my knee on the things a time or two while preaching, and when the doors let go it was like opening Fibber McGee's hall closet--everything but a Farmall tractor can come tumbling out of them. I suggested to one church recently that they empty the pulpit stand, stage a rummage sale, and pay off their building debt!

Also, it's funny to note how many times speakers and stands don't go together--either the stand is too tall, and the speaker too short, or the stand is too short and the speaker too tall--or one is wide while the other is thin, or vice-versa. I've experienced several sad misfits myself. I supplied once in a church which had a 6'-6" pastor and they had provided him with a stand to match his statue. I went into dark oblivion when I went up behind the thing, and a man told me after the service, "Brother Wilkie, I enjoyed that good sermon you preached through your nose--I never did see your mouth."

And at the other end of the spectrum was old Joe

Medford, the droll sage and wit of Haywood County Baptists. Joe is the pastor of Beulah Baptist Church in Canton, and, along with me, was on the program for a Haywood Associational meeting at the North Canton Baptist Church.

North Canton must have had a bumble bee for a pastor, for the pulpit stand was mighty short for even a theological runt like me, but I got along fine with it during my speech making. Small, short, and skinny things suit me in most cases.

However, Joe, in addition to being mostly bald, also towers up into the stratosphere like one of those rangy mountain balsams. He was raised on mountain taters and beans, plus a fat ground hog every now and then, and he shot up like a totem pole. When he got up there behind that stubby North Canton pulpit stand, it looked plumb ridiculous. Folks immediately started laughing out loud at the sight, and I was wishing for a camera.

Joe stood with a wry smile on his face, let the people get their laughs, looked down and around, then solemnly intoned, "Good folks, I apologize for my odd knees showing over this thing, but I'm standing as stooped as I can get!"

MULE EGG

Dr. Denard Spear ("Denny"), native of Kinston, but now living in Dunwoody, Georgia, where he serves and travels as head Chaplain for Days Inn, Inc., is always good for a tale of some sort every time I see him--I just don't see him often enough.

The last time I saw him was not under the best of conditions, as he returned to Kinston to bury his wonderful mother who had died suddenly, but even this adverse circumstance didn't douse his wit completely, as he took time to relate a tale he had heard in his travels--one which I had heard years ago from my wife's father but had completely forgotten, so I was grateful to Denny for bringing it back to me and "supplying me with a column." There are several versions of it, but one goes something like this:

These two batchelor cousins who had been business partners in upper-crust Boston for years decided they'd ditch crowded city life and "go country." They ended up

purchasing a big farm way down in the fabulous hill country in Texas, and moved down to take over and start farming.

Well, they didn't know the first thing about any kind of farming, of course, and really had to start from scratch. Someone informed them that they would first have to have a good mule in order to plow up their farm for planting, so they set out to find one, not knowing exactly just what kind of critter they were looking for, since none had plowed a mule on the Boston Common in a long time. After much inquiry, they were sent to a fellow who could furnish them with a mule, as he was supposed to have a "mule farm."

They finally located the mule dealer, who turned out to have that special brand of Texas humor, and immediately recognized that he had two raw, unschooled, city dudes on his hand. He chuckled to himself as he chatted with them.

With a serious tone, he summarily informed them that he didn't have a mule on hand right at the time, but that he did have a good, fresh, fertile mule egg on tap, and that they could pretty soon hatch their own mule and be in business. He added that it was much cheaper that way, too, and their business eyes lit up at the thought of a bargain. They fished out their pocket books.

They innocently paid a good price for the mule egg, which turned out to be a big, round watermelon--took it home, built a shallow nest according to the dealer's instructions, atop a little hill, and took turns sitting on it, lightly, day and night--expectantly awaiting the hatching of their mule.

Well, the thing accidently rolled out of the nest one day, went tumbling helter-skelter down the hill, with the cousins hot after it, and crashed into a big stump and splattered all over creation like a mush-rooming atom bomb.

A gigantic, nervous flop-eared Texas jack rabbit happened to be haunched behind the stump and he immediately hopped up and took off like forty through the texas brush, not looking back.

One of the cousins dashed after him crying frantically, "Come back here, little muley--come back--don't you recognize your own poppa?"

The other one stopped short, wiped his brow, and injected, "Aw, let him go, cousin. We couldn't keep a plow up with a mule that moves that fast, anyhow!"

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STOP THE BUS!

On certain distraughtful days, my late mother-in-law was fond of quoting that old saw, "If it were raining soup today, I'd be caught out in it with a pitch fork."

All of us, I'm sure, have had those days when we "got out of bed on the wrong side" and nothing went right from sunrise to sunset. You start out by hanging your big toe in a gaping hole in what you thought was your best pair of socks, dumping hot coffee in your lap, cutting your jaw to ribbons with a dull razor, finding all the zippers jammed in every stitch of clothing, and finally going out to a dead battery in the family bus--and all this is before you even get out of the house!

Up in Mount Airy the other week I heard about a case of utter frustration that struck a note of sympathy and understanding in my own fumbling, bumbling life. White haired, mustachioed Clate Brown, pastor of the Fancy Gap Baptist Church in Mount Airy, is fuller of tales than a barn of corn cobs, and he told me about a wretched fellow in town once who really "had one of those days"

This man was kinda the "town character"--rough and tumble, uncouth, frequent imbibor of the spirits, and possessing acute expertise in low-class cussing--fed constantly by a short, mean temper.

He went to a doctor on this particular day for treatment of several collective ailments, and the doc pumped him full of assorted medicines, plus a shot "that will make you woozy, so you go straight home and lie down a while."

Exiting the doctor's office, already feeling the effects of the shot, he hailed the first city bus he saw, crawled on, and unsteadily settled in a seat, feeling rather dizzy.

It turned out that the bus headed north when he needed to go south. He finally got off on the wrong side of town, miles from his house, hailed a bus going back in and stumbled onto it, mumbling madly to himself as he slouched into a rear seat, scowling like an aroused she-bear.

Well, that bus went into town, made a right turn, and headed east, and he still wasn't making progress toward home. Somewhere out in the eastern hinterlands he had to stumble off that bus and run down his third one for the day.

By this time he was almost in a drunken stupor from the dope, madder than forty wet hens, and when he flopped into a seat he started to cuss aloud under his breath at any and everything that crossed his addled brain--the doctor, the bus, the driver, the road, the city, the government, and everything else--unmindful of the other passengers, including women and children, who could easily discern his angry words.

Two preachers happened to be in the seat in front of him and got their theological ears full of cussing and ranting, which continued with unabated crescendo, getting worse every second.

Finally, one of the disturbed brothers turned, shook a rebuking finger, and said to the indiscriminate cusser, "Friend, you're on your way straight to hell!"

"Drat it!" exclaimed the doped-up cusser, rising and wobbling down the aisle toward the front, "I done got the wrong bus again--I want to go to White Plains!"

THE BALD TRUTH

Rev. Ray Shumate, pastor of the Dover Baptist Church out from Mount Airy up in Surry County, has long been one of my best sources for warm companionship and close communication--first up in Jefferson years ago, then at Smyrna Church out from Taylorsville, and now at Dover. We've been together in meetings, revivals, and conferences all over and back. His house is presently one of my stopping places on my monthly jaunts between North Carolina and West Virginia, where Ray, his good, black-haired wife, Mary, and gangling son, Jeff, (Now at Gardner Webb College) entertain and fete me royally.

All of this despite the way I treat the rascal--for I thrash him good at golf and continually take low pokes at his hairless pate. He has enough loose hair around the lower fringes to hide one desperate flea in a tight pinch--maybe. I refer to him as the great "Dover Dome," and while he was at Smyrna I always called him the big "Smyrna Slick." I've been trying to get him to join John Capps' famous organization of "Bald Headed Men of America, Inc.," but he resists even when I offer to pay his membership fee. He says that as long as he has two hairs on his head, he's not bald, and responds to my joking by folding his hands in the attitude of prayer, dropping to

one knee, and intoning, "Forgive him, Lord, he was born that way and can't help it."

Also, he likes to point out to me a framed statement he has prominently displayed on his living room wall which proudly states, "God made just so many perfect heads--the rest He covered with hair." And he adds a quote from Milton Sewell, pastor of Baine's Grove Church at Pilot Mountain, who said, "When God made man He experimented with different kinds of heads--round, flat, square, pointed, oblong, and every other kind--took a look at all of them, and the ones He didn't like, He covered with hair!" So he pretty well holds his own in the jabbing and jibbing, and I don't get by with much. Every now and then, in fact, he just plumb out-right gets the best of me, and I have to swallow my glib tongue in shame and defeat.

Like the time recently when I played a round of golf with him, Jeff, and his other son Reginald, of Charlotte. We were on the Beaver Creek course out from Mount Airy that has bent grass greens, like all western North Carolina courses do.

Bent grass has always frustrated me in golf when it comes to chipping and putting, for I'm mostly used to eastern rye and bermuda grasses, thick and slow, while bent grass is thin, fast, and as slick as Shumate's shining noggin. I can be right at the green, roll a chip shot way past the cup and then three-putt for a double bogey.

After a particular hole at Beaver Creek where I three-putted again, including a pitiful, final, missed one foot stab, I threw up my hands in utter disgust and discouragingly bewailed, "This blooming bent grass makes a pure-living jackass outta me!"

Came back Ray promptly and strongly, "Boy, don't stand there right out in the open public and insult our good Surry County jackasses by coming up here and trying to identify yourself with them!"

NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP

An outstanding, loving Baptist preacher who blessed and enriched my early and middle ministry was the late Reverend (Dr.) J. B. Willis of Hamlet. He may have had other pastorates, but I never knew him in any other

capacity than as the venerable and gifted pastor of Hamlet's First Baptist Church, where he must have served through at least two generations as active pastor, and another one as Pastor Emeritus until his death several years ago.

I first encountered him in the late forties when I went down to Wagram Baptist Church from the Kennedy Home to speak on the Home at the Pee Dee Association's annual meeting. He was the Associational Moderator, presiding over the sessions. He served as Associational Moderator for about as many years as he pastored the Hamlet Church--and also occupied many lofty positions in Baptist life over the state relative to programs and institutions. He was greatly loved far and wide, but especially in Hamlet. His name is revered there to this day, and ever will be. His marks and monuments are all over Hamlet!

From that first meeting, for some strange reason, he "took a liking to that skinny fellow from Kinston," and from that point on I exulted in the warmth and glow of his radiant presence every chance I got. Our encounters were many and varied through the years. He was one of the wisest, warmest, calmest, gentlest, most congenial souls I ever knew. He was always smiling, broadly--and a good tale was always on his lips.

He rubbed my funny bone one day by telling me about one of his sleeping deacons--a good man, faithful to the church and his duties, but with a low blood pressure problem that made staying awake to listen to sermons difficult. In fact, he didn't, for about the minute he sat, his head went down, and he passed completely out for the duration.

The sleepy deacon, after a good nap during the morning sermon, requested to ride out with him to a country church where Willis was to deliver the afternoon sermon during Homecoming festivities, saying, "That's my home church, pastor, and I'd surely like to go."

Willis warned him, "I'm going to use the same sermon out there, brother, that you heard this morning."

"Oh, that's all right, pastor--I won't mind."

Willis noted that the good brother got over into a corner and did his usual passing out at the afternoon service just as he had done at the morning one. He didn't hear two words of the whole sermon.

On the way back into town, Willis facetiously asked, eyeing him shyly with a knowing smile, "Well, dear

brother, how did you like the sermon this afternoon -- boring, I guess?"

"Oh, my goodness no!" he answered, straightening up in his seat, "I tell you, pastor, it was ten times gooder the second go-round. You oughtta put that sermon in print so everybody could read it!"

"Can you read, dear brother?" asked Willis.

"Sure, pastor."

"Then, I believe I will!"

TOO LATE TOO LITTLE

The late Rev. R. L. (Bob) Councilman of Burlington was a giant of a man--spiritually and physically. I knew, worked with, and loved him during my days in the fifties while serving as missionary in the Mount Zion Association, covering Alamance and Orange counties.

Bob served as the ebullient pastor in several churches over the state, but closed out his fruitful ministry in his home town of Burlington by pastoring the Northside Baptist Chapel. At that time, the Chapel was a new mission of the Burlington First Baptist Church, meeting in a small frame building, but which exists today as one of the city's most lively, thriving churches--housed in an imposing complex of brick buildings. This is due in large measure to Bob's careful and wise leadership during its neophyte days when he slowly laid a solid sound foundation for future growth. I helped him many times in teaching, training, and preaching--and the mission grew, anyhow!

He gave a lot of time and effort to the work, but also operated an office supply business, in several states, to supplement the small income from the church. He was a busy, industrious man, indeed--and a good family man, too--husband and father.

I'll always remember one of his good sermons delivered at the mission one Sunday night, using the general theme of "Use or Lose," aimed mostly at his young people, including me, as I wasn't exactly "over the hill" in those days. He urged every young person to take, use, and develop every talent and ability God had given them--while they were in the prime of life before time and tide could make inroads and erode them. He said, "You better do while you can--the day will come when you

can't!"

He laughingly used himself as a prime example of his thesis, which was characteristic of the man. "Now, young folks," he stressed, "some of these older ones here tonight remember me back in my slim high school days when I was a star on the track team. Back then, you could give me ten seconds, and I could run the hundred yard dash right on it--or in even less time than that."

"But just look at me now," he added, stepping from behind the pulpit and proudly patting his expansive, Santa-Claus paunch, "you could give me all day and I couldn't even walk a hundred yards--much less run them!"

Well, on here in the eighties I can really understand and empathize with Bob's position back in the fifties--much more than I could when I heard him preach. During my own youthful days at the Mills home in Thomasville, one of my nicknames, among many, was "Speedy," for I could outrun everything on the place. I could really pick em up and put em down, especially when I got scared. I was small and skinny, but excellent in all sports on the campus, and held my own in contact sports with behemoths twice my size, depending on speed and quickness--a bear can't catch a rabbit!

However, today, if a sick, three-legged turtle stole my dinner I'd starve to death before I could chase him down. It's a good lesson, indeed--you'd better do your running when you're twenty!

THE RIGHT KEY

I've worked with, and loved, Baptist preachers all over North Carolina for over forty years - and am conversant with the ins and outs of the ministry. I don't believe I've ever seen a time when preachers in general, Baptist or otherwise, are more restless than during these troubled, inflationary days. Some preachers are moving and jumping about like scared rabbits - constantly seeking improvement and more security for themselves and their families.

Of course, every time any preacher makes a move, he assigns it summarily to "the will of the Lord," and that fact seems to satisfy and justify any kind of move - regardless. A preacher certainly shouldn't make a move from strictly an economic posture, but this element

certainly enters into the picture quite often.

We're all familiar with that incident where a struggling parson was considering a change to a larger church and told his wife, "You start packing, honey, while I go upstairs to pray and seek the Lord's will in this matter."

Something similar to this took place up state not long ago in a church we'll call "Granite Rock" for telling purposes. The fine pastor began to experience restlessness and dissatisfaction with his work. Having been there for ten years, he felt he had reached a plateau where things were leveling off and that new blood should be brought in, so he began looking for other work.

He succeeded in having Glenfalls Church, about 40 miles up the road in another county, to call him as pastor, and prepared his resignation statement for Granite Rock.

He read the statement at the close of a morning service, thanking the good people for the privilege of serving them, but pointed out that God had called him to fresh new fields.

When he finished, the chairman of the deacons asked for the floor, and said sadly, "Pastor, your unexpected resignation this morning kinda throws a monkey wrench into some of our plans."

"How's that, brother?" asked the pastor, leaning over the pulpit stand, eyeing him closely.

"Well, some of us were well aware of the fact that you have literally worn out your old Ford car while serving us here, so we have been secretly and quietly getting up a fund to replace your old car."

"My! That's a fine gesture, my good brother," said the pastor.

"In fact," continued the chairman, "the project is completed - and we now have a new two-toned, \$15,000, 1986 Buick, with all the extras, sitting out front, and had planned to present it to you at the close of the service today - but I guess now we'll just have to hold it for your successor, as we bought it to serve on our church field - not another."

The surprised preacher stepped down from the rostrum and approached the deacon. "Just give me the keys to that new Buick, my good brother, and I'll drive right over to Glenfalls and let them folks know the Good Lord has done told me to stay at Granite Rock!"

There are several ways usually in which one can improve his "present situation" if he's ambitious, inventive, and resourceful. Not many of us have the mental acumen of Paul to be "content in whatsoever state I am," for we're restless, malcontent, and always on the prowl for something bigger, newer and better than what we already have. Few want to remain where and how they are. This is good if properly motivated and channeled.

For instance, I couldn't argue in the least with a struggling rural pastor I heard about long ago who badly needed better things, and a more prosperous situation than what he had.

Along with many other country preachers from over the south, he attended a large Rural Church Conference down in Atlanta, Georgia. Experts from all over the country came to expound and exhort the brothers on how to develop, enjoy, and prosper in the rural pastorate.

One dynamic speaker in particular attracted and impressed this good needy preacher. The forceful orator indicated and stressed that the real secret to a successful rural pastorate lay in the pastor "getting right down there with his simple folks of the soil."

He emphasized that the rural pastor should be up on something besides just theology - that he ought to fully inform himself on every detail of farming in general - be able to intelligently discuss crop rotation, pig raising, cow tending, chicken brooding, goat herding, and everything else relative to successful farming - and to be able and prepared to help his members on to better farming, especially in the matter of enrichment and improvement of the soil. He indicated that the best farmer in the world couldn't raise a profitable crop on poor soil, so the rural preacher should be sensitive to this vital matter and be ready to advise his members on it.

He ended by forcefully saying, "If you rural pastors will help your farmer members understand the necessity of getting and maintaining rich, productive soil, then things will improve all around - crops will be more plentiful, income larger and more stable, and your church will reflect the growth - things will get better and richer there, too. Why, your people will prosper so much that they might even vote to raise your salary!"

Later, this impoverished pastor said to some friends, "I tell you one thing, brothers, if soil enrichment will help my folks raise my puny salary, I'm gonna do something about it. I'm just a simple Biblical 'hellfire, damnation, and brimstone' preacher - but I'm going back to my church, loosen my collar, roll up my sleeves, take a text, then rear back and preach hellfire, damnation, brimstone, sulphur, phosphate, and lime!"

PRAYER TIME

I once spent a whole week in the home of the irrepressible Rev. C. D. Sawyer - and managed to survive. It came back in 1958 when I went over to Asheville to assist him in a revival meeting at Starne's Cove Church. I was living in Canton at the time, just 20 miles distant, and could have easily commuted, but he insisted that I take up residence for the week under his roof and care.

C.D., who died several years ago, was a physical Goliath and could have thumped off my head with his little finger, so I moved in according to his demands, and set about that surviving. It took some one more doing!

Two things C.D. loved dearly - the Bible and coffee, and he about saturated me with both to the point of total collapse. He used the coffee to keep me awake, then used my forced alertness to "discuss the Bible" around the kitchen table until 3 a.m., or even later a time or two. It sounded and looked plumb ridiculous, but the big, humble rascal would put his arm around my shoulder, towering over me like the Washington Monument, and meekly say, "Now, Wilkie, I look up to you - and trust you - and I don't know much, so you just gotta tell me what this passage means - have some coffee and start talking."

And this didn't start until way past my normal bedtime, after his own family had retired, and we were left alone in the kitchen. I'd drink a cup of coffee, shake my head, clear my mottled brain, and try to answer all his questions about the passage - then rise to head for bed, but he'd pull me back down, pour another cup of coffee, and start on another passage. I about talked him through the whole Bible during the course of the week, and didn't get enough sleep to keep a water bug healthy. I didn't think he ever slept.

But I remember one morning his wife was sick, and

C.D. had to cook my breakfast. I'll never forget the sight of the huge, awkward thing standing by the stove, wearing a floppy "T" shirt, a little bitty red apron stuck on his enormous paunch, and a spatula in his hand.

"Wilkie," he said shyly, "I'm not too good at this cooking stuff."

"You've been getting a whale-of-a-lot of somebody's cooking, you big over inflated bear," I teased, sitting down at the table.

"Quit that funny mess and tell me how you want your egg."

"Any old way I can get it," I answered, "but I'm kinda like the fellow who said he liked his egg runny but didn't want to give out of breath trying to catch it!"

"Well," he came back, "all I know how to do is bust an egg in the pan and pray."

"Bust and pray away, brother," I urged.

But that night at church, from the pulpit, I told his members about my breakfast and C.D.'s remark, adding strongly, "And, folks, judging from the clobbered, messed-up gook he set before me, his poor prayers certainly didn't get through!"

He jumped up and yelled out, "You can cook your own from now on, brother!" And I had to do it, too. He never went near that stove again - except to brew a fresh barrel of coffee for sleepy, one-eye-opened Bible study!

THE HAIRCUT

Sometimes "the worm turns" and we don't even have to nudge the wriggly thing - it just happens, and one gets his just deserts despite all-get-out. Things have a way of coming out even.

Dr. Warren C. Hultgren, white-haired and dynamic pastor of the tremendous First Baptist Church of Tulsa, Oklahoma, speaking at Ridgecrest Baptist Center, illustrated this principle when he told of a fellow getting a haircut at his favorite local barbershop.

As he settled in the chair, the talkative barber inquired of his general health and well-being.

"Oh, I'm fine," said the fellow, "in fact, I'm gonna take a trip overseas, and I need an extra special good haircut this morning."

"You'll get it, pal," exuded the barber, placing a

towel around his shoulders, "where you going?"

"To Italy."

"To Italy?" came back the barber. "I was over there a couple of years ago and wish I'd stayed home - lousiest country in the whole world - cold, wet, foggy, and the people are just as cold. Where you going in Italy?"

"Well, I'll end up in Rome, I guess," replied the man.

"Lousy city - dirty and cluttered, and the folks are unfriendly, and take you for everything you've got. Where you staying?"

"At the Hilton."

"Why, that hotel is so lousy that Hilton took his name off it," warned the barber, as he began clipping away, "and the food's so lousy that rats won't even steal it. How're you going?"

"By Atari Airlines - already got my ticket."

"So did I - but never again - that's the lousiest airline in the whole sky - sassy stewardesses - lousy movies - lousy food."

"Well, I've got an audience with the Pope, and I certainly hope that doesn't turn out lousy," the man replied, brushing hair off.

A month later, the fellow was back in the barbershop, and the barber greeted him with a strong handshake. "How was your trip, pal?"

"Oh, just hunky-dory, friend," exclaimed the happy man, "everything went fine - the weather was excellent - the country side beautiful - the people friendly - Rome was great - the hotel had first-class accommodations - food and services were the best - and the airline was first-rate all the way - a good movie, too."

"How'd your audience with the Pope go?"

"Oh, I'm glad you asked me about that," came back the man, removing his coat and loosening his collar. "When the Pope bent over to let me kiss his ring, do you know what he asked me?"

"No - what?" asked the curious barber.

"Where in all this whole wide world, poor friend, did you get that lousy haircut?"

WHAT'S IN A NAME

The question has often been asked, "What's in a

name?" There must be a lot of funny hidden stuff in some names, for folks who don't like the names their parents hung on them often go to court to change things and come away with a more suitable legal handle - at least as far as they are concerned, though, as it is said, "A rose by any other name is still a rose" - and smells like one.

An unhappy fellow appeared before a judge one time, according to the daily papers, to request a name change. When the judge asked his name, the chap hung his head, and said softly, "Ralph Stinky, Sir." Well," replied the sympathetic magistrate, "that is quite a smelly name - don't know as I blame you for wanting a change. What did you want to change it to?" "Sir," replied the man, raising his voice, "I just don't like the name Ralph - could I put in for Joe?"

And out in Kansas City recently a tight-lipped judge was most adverse to the efforts of a Greek named Vincent Aloysius to change his name to honor a bunch of his Greek friends and fellow musicians. The judge ruled the proposed change would mess up too many computers, though, as someone remarked on the side, he should have known that all computers were pretty messed up to start with. Anyway, the judge turned down Vincent when he put in for the honorable and commemorative name of "Xartheohadjimadurokaszamnoupoulos." I don't know about the computer, but that sure would leave a fellow's tongue in one-whale-of-a-twisted fix!

But I had the most fun with names recently when I went up to preach at Wayside Baptist Chapel in Buckhannon, West Virginia. On the way out to the chapel on the edge of town, I passed a big sign denoting the location of "Zickefoose Trailers" and about ran off the road looking and laughing. I live in a trailer while in West Virginia, but I don't think it came from Buckhannon.

After church I was talking to a male member out front and asked him about the strange name on the sign, wanting to know how to pronounce it, laughing heartily as I inquired.

He replied matter-of factly, "Oh, it's not hard to pronounce, just like it looks - Zick-e-foose. That's a common name around here. In fact, my wife was a Zickefoose, though I'm just a plain old Smith."

When I got back to my motel room that afternoon, I found out the fellow was right. I took the phone book and discovered over 40 Zickefooses listed for Buckhannon - and

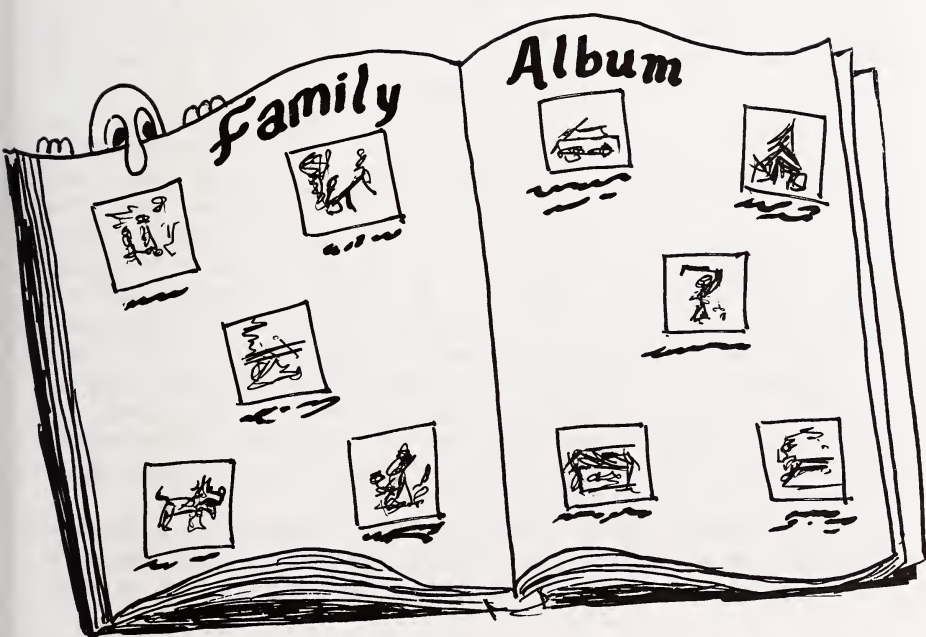
there were probably a lot more running around in the county at large zicking up their fooses.

But in looking up the Zickefooses, I got enthralled with other "Z" names in the Buckhannon phone book, and had some more laughs. I noted names like Zapp, Zatha, Zgonce, Zebuhr, Zinn, Zirkle, Zepp, and Zumbach, to name a few.

I mused to myself, "Well, if old Zickefoose got mad with some of those folks he could get a Zinn to help him find a sharp Zirkle, and he sho could Zapp a Zopp on the Zgonce and have no Zumbach from Zotho and Zebuhr at all - and old Zickefoose could just laugh his head off at the whole mess!"

JUST LOOKIN' AROUND

In The Family



SPOOFING THE SPITTOON

My late father-in-law, Reverend H.M. Stroup, Sr., of Spruce Pine, used to get a big kick out of telling about an incident that graphically illustrated the old truism that "you can get the boy out of the country, but you can't get the country out of the boy."

He declared it to be a true happening, and I never had the nerve to disagree with him or dispute his word - I was afraid he'd take back his pretty daughter!

But seems back at the turn of the century, down in Georgia, an ambitious country boy forsook the red hills of the Georgia farming lands and went up to Atlanta "to make his fortune." He was highly successful in every business venture he undertook, and was soon a millionaire one or two times over, with vast holdings.

At his death, his will revealed, among many other things, that he had left the ownership, lock stock and barrel, of a plush, down-town hotel to his "favorite nephew back home." The simple nephew had never been to Atlanta, and hadn't so much as spent a night in a hotel, much less owning one. But, in time, he was duly informed of his new acquisition and given full title to the tall, fancy establishment.

His elated country friends stripped him of his dirty overalls, made him shave and bathe, then dressed him up in high-class, city finery for the trip to Atlanta to inspect and possess his new-found fortune.

When his presence and identity became known to the hotel staff, naturally, there was a lot of handshaking, bowing, scraping, and kow-towing to his every need and desire. He finally took a seat in a high-backed chair in the lush lobby and settled back to view surroundings with more deliberate attention. He reached into his back pocket, pulled out a big plug of Brown's Mule, cut off a slab with a pocket knife, stuffed it into his jaw and started chomping away with elated abandonment.

The observant desk clerk hastily motioned to a brightly liveried bellhop, who rushed over with a gleaming, ornate, polished brass spittoon, discretely placed it on the floor to the right of the country boy, and retired to his station.

The nephew eyed him closely, chewed on, finally glanced down suspiciously at the spittoon, then let fly with a wide stream of loose juice that splattered across

the white marble floor - just as if he were back home around the sand-boxed, pot-bellied stove in the crossroads store with his overalled, free-spitting country cronies.

The desk clerk looked on aghast, but remained silent, not wanting to upset the new owner. He feverishly motioned the bellhop back to quietly move the spittoon to the left.

The country boy chewed on and watched everything with raised eyebrows, then promptly went ka-splat off to the right. He settled back for more juicing.

The third go-round, the harried bellhop carefully placed the gleaming spittoon right in front of his new boss. Shifting his cud as he watched, the rural bumpkin finally drolled, "Dressed-up, boy, effen ya don't be a mite careful where you set that thar pretty dish herebouts, the first think ya know, I'm just plumb liable to haul off and spit in the dang thing!"

HUNTER'S STEW

My strapping, Kentucky son-in-law, Reverend Don McWhorter, pastor of the Broadway Baptist Church in Richmond, Kentucky, goes around with a Bible in one hand and a gun in the other - he's a preacher and a hunter! Of course, he uses the Bible in the pulpit and the gun in the woods, and never vice-versa - though all preachers, I'm sure, have met and dealt with sinners they would have handled better with a gun than the Bible.

But recently Don and a bunch of husky, hardy hunters from around Richmond packed up their guns and took off for the upper regions of Canada for some real, extended bear hunting, planning to stay gone for two full weeks, using a rented "cabin in the wilds" for an operating base. The days of hunting were mostly exciting and enjoyable, with a few dull moments thrown in, perhaps, but from all I can hear, the most memorable moments came after the day's chase and all gathered in the spacious cabin for resting, feeding, bedding, and gabbing - especially the gabbing.

One night a certain brusing bear-bagger reluctantly informed the others, "Fellows, I'll have to go back home in a couple of days - just can't stay the full two weeks."

The others immediately jumped all over him with ribbing and jestful jostling about being the meek subject of the Queen wife back home, with one burly, bearded

hunter saying lightly, "Guys, I bet my bottom dollar he's a little old prissy 'yes, m'aam - no, m'aam' man back home - and a week off for hunting is all he could get permission for." Everybody laughed like forty and stomped the floor in glee.

Well, another, known to all for his rabid hunting habits, who practically lived in the woods day and night, spoke up and added, "That ain't so bad, fellows - I'm a 'yes, m'aam - no, m'aam' man myself."

"Surely not you, of all folks in Kentucky?" injected a surprised companion beside him, placing a hand on his arm for reassurance.

"Oh, yea, it's true," slowly replied the man, breaking his gun and lifting it to peer down the opened barrel, "most any day I just say to my inquiring wife, yes, m'aam, I'm going hunting - no, m'aam, I don't know when I'll be back!"

Another threw in, "Well, guys, long as I've got a loaded gun, I ain't gonna 'yes, m'aam - no, m'aam' no woman when it comes to my hunting."

"A dern gun don't do me any good," added an intrepid fellow with a wry smile - "my wife can out draw me - I have to out think her."

"My little wife makes mighty fine hunter's stew," said another, "she just hunts around the kitchen and throws in anything she can grab."

And one brave, giggling hunter even fiendishly needled son-in-law Don, teasing, "I bet the way the preacher gets outta the house is to slip out while everybody's heads are bowed in prayer during family devotions."

That gunned-up Kentucky bunch may have gone up to Canada for bear, but it sounds as if they shot mostly bull!

POPEYED PAPAW

I've got a big strapping son-in-law, Don McWhorter, who is a proud native Kentuckian, former Marine, veteran of the Vietnam jungles, Baptist preacher - and hunter supreme, who can hit a gnat's right eye from a 100 yards.

Though he has downed a couple of hefty bears while hunting, his biggest bounty occurred when he came hunting down here in North Carolina and bagged my oldest daughter,

Lou, and carted her back to the hills of Kentucky. He shot her down with a "Kentucky Line" that was as long as a dragon's tail and hauled her off before I even knew she was out of the cage! Those Kentucky hunters are fast and sneaky - and seldom miss once they take aim.

He is currently the pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Richmond, Kentucky, but he served a three-year term here in North Carolina as pastor of Smyrna Church up near Taylorsville, so has a little dab of tar on his heels, at least, and gets a big kick telling about some of his North Carolina experiences - which includes those two bears.

Folks from North Carolina sometimes think that Kentuckians "talk funny," but Don says he discovered that Tar Heels talk even funnier, and that he had just to guess at what some of them meant at times.

He recounts the time he was out visiting at Smyrna and stopped by to see a member who was building a new house. Several folks were standing around watching an old, grey-haired lady walking about holding out before her a forked peach tree limb - "witching" for water, trying to select a spot for successful well digging. He joined in watching the strange maneuvers, smiling to himself.

One fellow finally remarked, "I just don't believe in that water-witching stuff - it's a lotta malarky."

Answered another, spitting out the side of his mouth, "Me neither. I didn't need none of that peach tree mess at my house - we-uns jest went out, dug a hole, struck one of them 'Argentinian wells,' and got water gushing up all over the place!"

And while visiting another member in the hospital who was being treated for severe diabetes, Don tried to sympathize with him and impart encouragement. "Oh, that's all right, pastor," the patient answered, "I'm gonna be fine, for they keep coming in here and shootin' me fulla that 'Instant,' and it works good!"

But the best came from one of his own children as far as I'm concerned. He and Lou have given us four rambunctious grandchildren, who collectively call me "Papaw" and my wife "Nanny."

They took the three oldest to see the full-length movie on "Popeye," leaving the lively three-year old in the capable hands of accommodating neighbors. The younguns really enjoyed the antics of Popeye, Olive Oyl, Bluto, and Wimpy, and returned home singing in unison the familiar "I'm Popeye the sailor man, I eat my spinach and

fight to the finish, I'm Popeye the sailor man - toot, toot."

Though the three-year old didn't get in on the movie, Don reports that he really did get in on the singing, and ended up waddling all over the house yelling out, "I'm Papaw the sinner man - toot, toot!"

DIG THAT SHED!

The saying is that "time marches on," and I know one thing for sure - it certainly hasn't been standing still during my lifetime. Not my wife's, either, for she recently gathered at Meredith College with her classmates to celebrate the 40th anniversary of their graduation.

On hand for the occasion was one of her best buddies from college days, Virginia Gilliland of Macon, North Carolina, who courted and married one of my old Wake Forest College classmates, big, ever-smiling Harold Bailey, who came up to Wake Forest from the hilly environs of Burnsville. Nancy and I often "double-dated" with Virginia and Harold, and the four of us share many memorable pictures and memories from those happy days - bus rides, picnics, parties, days in the park, movies, concerts, ball games, long walks, and whatnot - and a whole lot of whatelse!

While Nancy and I have been trotting all over creation through the years, Virginia and Harold settled in Buckingham, Virginia, where she put her Meredith learning to use in County Extension work, while Harold invested his polished Wake Forest skills laboring in an elected position with Baltimore Farm Bureau, plus establishing and maintaining a hog and cattle farm with latter day help from his only child, son Roy.

Now, Harold Bailey was as plain as an unmarked package, and as down-to-earth as a red clod of Yancey County clay, as well as unpretentious as a skittery mouse in a barn full of cats - and I discovered, that after 40 years, he had lost none of that simple demeanor, and was the same old Harold I knew during courting and college days.

This came out anew when he told of recently leading a contingent of Farm Bureau folks cross the Virginia line into the hills of West Virginia for a convention convening at the Greenbrier Hotel at White Sulphur Springs.

Greenbrier, of course, is one of America's most famous, imposing, elegant, exclusive, high-class, and pretentious resort hotels - presidents, kings, queens, princes, senators, judges and governors by the scores have occupied and enjoyed its many first-rate facilities. I've gone by and looked!

Harold led his little caravan into the flower-lined, circular driveway before the main entrance and proceeded right up under the wide, commodious, ornate porte-cochere to the front door, where fancy liveried doormen rushed to do his bidding. The others, a little hesitant, drew to a halt back up the driveway.

Harold got out, went back to them, and drawled, "You folks don't have to stay way back here - you can pull up under the shed alongside me - plenty of room there."

From there on out, his farmer friends ribbed him unmercifully for the undignified and countryfied lingo in such stately, refined surroundings, laughing until they were blue in the face.

"Well," said Harold, in intense retaliation, "back home that's what we call anything you drive a car or wagon under. I don't care if it's sticking out from Buckingham Palace and made of pure gold with the Taj Mahal in the middle, if you drive a car up under it, the dang thing's a shed - pure and simple!"

MANHUNT

My wife's oldest sister, raven-haired Mable, (Mrs. Claude Johnston - now widowed) lives up in Weldon and is a "character" that everyone ought to have the privilege of meeting. In my 38 years of married life that good sister-in-law has been a constant source of joy, fun, and profit - as have the other three sisters-in-law I acquired, too - but "Mabe" is something special.

Now retired and into her seventies, she taught school for years, first in Littleton, then in Weldon. Years ago one of her pupils whom she had to discipline, angrily referred to her as "that Old Witch," so that's what we lovingly call her to this day - and she concurs!

She is most bewitching in so many ways. She can keep you in stitches for hours on end talking about schools, pupils, events, churches, preachers, history, and what-all. Her experiences have been many and varied.

In her early career, following college, (Mary Hardin Simmons in Texas and Carson Newman in Tennessee) she was active in Sunday School work over the state through the Sunday School Department of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, being "an Approved Worker." She could spend a week with a little struggling, poorly organized church and leave it in A-One shape.

One time she received an assignment for a week in a little mountain church so far back up in a deep cove that "the sun didn't come up until noon." She was to ride the train up to a little station where someone from the church was to pick her up and transport her to the field and look after her needs for the week.

She arrived at the station, retrieved her bags, and stood by waiting for someone to get her - but no one greeted her, and she got a little uneasy. She noticed an over-alled man standing by a mule and wagon and finally went over to him to inquire about the location of the church.

Well, he turned out to be her host. He did a double-take, looked at her askance, eyes wide with surprise, but hastened to apologize most profusely for his remissness.

He loaded her on the wagon, still looking at her out of the corner of his eye, and they bumped and joggled along a rutty road for five miles back into the mountains. She got settled in a small room at his rustic cabin, met his family, had a plain meal with them, and then got back onto the wagon for the short trip to the little church for the opening meeting.

It was a simple, small, one-room, wood-framed building, but was filled with good mountain folks, faces all aglow.

Her host introduced Mabe to the folks, and said, still looking at her with odd expression, "Those folks in Raleigh jest told me to go pick up our worker for the week - didn't say what - and I shore wuz surprised when I seen it wuz a woman - I wuz a-looking fer a man!"

When Mabe got up, she looked at him sympathetically, and drawled, "That's all right, sir, don't feel badly about that -- I've been a-looking fer a man for ten years myself!"

My wife, along with several other good women in the church, has been an ordained deaconess for 15 years at the Spilman Memorial Baptist Church here in Kinston - even serving two terms as a chairman of the group, leading out in a \$450,000 building program.

The matter of women taking positive leadership positions of any sort in a church is a theological "bone of contention" with many of my preacher and deacon brethren, and I respect their position - though, obviously, I stand in disagreement with them on the matter of deaconesses - and a sound, biblical basis, too!

But aside from any scriptural argument, consider the purely logical aspects of the following incident which took place recently in a nearby church on a Sunday night.

Mary, a petite teen-age girl with long, flowing hair, sat all alone in a room at the rear of the church - her head bowed in prayer.

All of a sudden the door was flung open, startling Mary out of her posture and spirit of prayer, and there stood a floosie-haired teen-aged girl, chomping loudly on gum, and looking around the room.

"This the bathroom, gal?" she asked flippantly, stepping in, closing the door, and placing hands on her hips.

"No," answered Mary, rising, "this is the waiting room for the baptizing tonight."

"You mean that funny stuff where that preacher takes you out there in front of all those people and dunks you in the water?" said the girl, eyeing Mary curiously.

"Yes," replied Mary.

"Whatcha wanta do that for, anyway?"

"Because I accepted Jesus as my Saviour, and I'm expected to follow Him in Baptism as a testimony to it. Aren't you a Christian and church member?"

"Heck, naw! I just came to this church tonight to be with a cute boy I met at school this week. He wanted to come to church, but I'll get him out to a good dance club after this church doing is over - you can bet on that. We'll have some fun yet," the girl said lightly, rotating her hips to simulate dancing.

"Well, you could become a Christian if you accept Jesus, and you could be baptized, too. You'd never regret it," urged Mary.

"I ain't much for that Jesus stuff - cramps my style - and I sure ain't gonna let no crummy preacher duck me in cold water and mess up my clothes and hair. I'm just looking for the bathroom - not heaven - see you around. Don't get drowned!" She left, slamming the door.

Mary returned to her chair as a soft rap came at the door.

"Yes?" she answered strongly, rising again.

"Mary," came a deep male voice through the door, "just checking to see how you're coming - us deacons have met with the boys, helped them dress, read some scripture, had prayer with them, and got them ready - are you ready for baptism, Mary?"

"Yea," replied Mary dourly - "REAL ready!"

ONE MORE MESS

Hanging on the wall in my friendly kitchen is a framed, needle-worked little poem (Don't know the author) which says:

Altho you'll find our house a mess,
Come in - sit down - converse.
It doesn't always look like this,
Sometimes - it's even worse!

Well, my whole house and yard hit rock-bottom last week in looking "even worse," which doesn't happen often, for I married a "pick-em-up-put-em away" Home Economics teacher who is the essence of orderliness and neatness.

But a sudden, swirling storm, which seemed to be a combination hurricane-tornado, swept through, inside and out, with scattering, destructive, devastating force. Everything was left in a state of total, messy disarray. It took us all day to clean, straighten, repair, and restore things to normalcy.

First, I had to get tools, posts, and nails to mend my garden fence which was flattened in a couple of places - as I didn't want the rabbits to beat me to my mixed salad and lettuce, or have stray dogs doing things to my tender beans. I rehung the dangling gate, also.

Then, I had to climb atop my red tool shed to throw off various limbs, sticks, and boards, as well as retrieve a lawn chair that somehow got up there. And a shaky climb up the ladder to the house top recouped my yard rake,

patio broom, and a couple of bricks from a flower bed border. At least no shingles needed replacing on the roof.

It took a little longer to repair and rebuild several flower beds that looked like two mad jungle cats had had a life and death struggle smack dab in the middle of all of them. My little rock garden was especially in terrible shape, with every rock moved out of place. Each one had to be located and reset, being careful not to damage what few precious plants had survived.

My two large fig trees looked like the Witch of Endor after a wet shampoo - leaves all over the ground, little green figs strewn about, and broken limbs dangling here and there from top to bottom. I raked the leaves, clambered over the trees with saw and sealing paint, and managed to get them looking decent again.

The back and front lawns required an expeditious raking and grooming, for debris of every description was strewn about. A few gouged out places needed repairing and reseeding.

Also, I had to hose down the dirt-smeared windows of the house, and spend another hour raking and brooming scattered pea gravel from my driveway - up and down the sidewalk, in the yard, and out in the middle of the street in midst of zooming traffic.

During my outside labors, the good wife was busy inside with mop, broom, soap, water, wax, and bending back - washing, sweeping, scrubbing, picking up, rearranging - and succeeded in getting the house decor back to her Home Economics standards.

Well, at day's end, we wearily plopped down together on the living room couch, looking like two charred escapees from a raging forest fire. We held hands, gazed lovingly into each other's peaked eyes, and sighed deeply as I asked, with her nodding glowing agreement, "Aren't those four growing grandbabies of ours the sweetest little devils who ever lived?"

A TRADE-IN

When I went shopping with my wife recently to get a gift for a future bride, she left me standing around in the bridal section of an exclusive downtown department store.

The shop was full of fine, long, veiled bridal gowns of every description, immaculately displayed on stylish mannequins set in provocative poses. A couple of heavily jeweled dowagers, with giddy young daughters in tow, were poking, touching and testing the whole line of gowns one by one. A prim, precisely attired clerk, with striped pants and split-tailed coat, stood by expectantly, eyeing every procedure, but offering no assistance.

My own attention came to rest on one lone woman - off to one side, quietly going about her business of inspecting various gowns. The prissy clerk constantly cut his eye in her direction, and his pointed nose would go a little higher, as if in disdain.

The woman, about in her mid-fifties with steel-grey hair, definitely looked out of place in such elegant surroundings - as much as I did! Her dress was obviously rural - long, plain, and wrinkled. Her thick, pink socks were slack about her ankles, and her black shoes splotted with dried mud. She had a crude, hand-woven shawl draped in disarray about her shoulders. A large, brown purse dangled from her left elbow by a thin, frayed strap.

She stood overly long at one particular expensive looking white gown, lovingly fingering it, stepping back repeatedly to appraise it, nodding her head, as a faint smile crept over her wizened features - and a far-away, dreamy look stole into her moist, blue eyes. I was fascinated as I silently observed her. She stepped back and stood gazing at the gown a full two minutes - transfixed.

She finally turned, looked back at the gown once more, and stepped slowly toward the clerk, who had retreated behind a counter. As she pointed at the gown, I heard her inquire in a quiet voice concerning the price.

I heard the clerk reply instantly, with harsh tones, "That gown, madam, is \$750!"

She nervously fingered her purse, started to open it, then paused as her shoulders sagged in a sad gesture of resignation. Evidently, she knew there was no need to open the purse. But she still stood with her gaze fixed on that gown. The clerk continued to look down upon her across his nose, drumming on the counter with his fingers, waiting for the inevitable.

Then, with an impulsive move, she stepped forward, quickly slipped a large diamond ring off her finger and held it up before the amazed clerk.

"Please, sir," she pleaded with tearful voice, "could you take this for the gown? My poor dead John wouldn't mind - he'd want the best for his only daughter's wedding!"

FALSE RETURNS

Sometimes certain things seem so natural and obvious in light of existing circumstances that we just accept them for face value - and respond accordingly. However, I've discovered that some of these obvious "face value" things have two faces - one you see and the one you don't.

One of the saddest, most traumatic experiences in my life come in May, 1948, when I decided to say Goodby to the wife, baby son Everett, all the children at Kennedy Home, and take off for the Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. I was due to be gone at least all summer, and if I could get settled in some kind of job or student pastorate, then Nancy and the bubbling one-year old son were to join me - otherwise, I'd be back to resume the pastorate at Kennedy Home, and try for the Seminary again later.

In our six years of marriage up to that point, Nancy and I had never been separated by all that time and distance, and it was a little tough on both of us. After the family Ford was all packed and ready, it took me half the day to finally break away and get started, leaving them standing on the steps of one of the cottages where they were to stay, waving and throwing kisses, along with scores of the children who lined the driveway to wave - it was a heart-rending experience, indeed, and I could hardly see the road through misty eyes.

Well, I wasn't four miles gone before I saw an approaching weather front rolling toward me that was the most ominous, rolling, threatening thing I'd ever seen. Then, the rain hit in wind-blown torrents, fierce lightning crackled all around, and that enormous black cloud just kept coming - right down the middle of the road, it seemed. I immediately thought, "Tornado!" - foolishly panicked, whipped that Ford around in the road, and took off for Kennedy Home like a frantic june bug fleeing from a hungry rooster. I was scared plumb out of all common sense, and pushed that waterlogged buggy in excess of 80 miles per hour, and came skidding side-wise up before the steps at the cottage.

Five minutes after I had gone I was back in the apartment, trembling like Santa Claus' little round belly, and shaking off water all over the floor. I heard such caterwauling coming from the bedroom that I thought half the dairy herd was in there dying from the colic or something.

When I rushed in, there sat Nancy clutching Everett in her arms, with both of them bawling like forty at the top of their lungs. I was deeply and mysteriously touched, rushed over, put my sympathetic arms around them, and bravely assured the surprised Nancy that things weren't really going to be all that bad - that I'd just be gone for the summer, not forever, and that surely I would be sending for them soon and we'd be back together in short order. I patted her shoulder lovingly and gently - consolingly.

She looked up at me with teary eyes, tried to still Everett, and said, "Poor Everett just now fell off the bed and landed on his head - there's a big knot - feel it - and what are you doing back here so quick - you haven't chickened out on the Seminary already, have you?"

TONE DEAF

I have no "ear, eye, or tongue" for music, but still manage somehow to muster up enough mysterious faculties to love and appreciate good music - secular and religious. Music, "the universal language," speaks to the soul of even a tone-deaf dunce like me.

When I'm in a church and the music blesses and lifts me to spiritual heights, I take time to express my gratitude and congratulations to choirs, quartets, trios, solos, or whatever. We sometimes take our church musicians for granted and fail to recognize all the time, trouble, and practice that goes into their presentations; so I want them to know I'm aware of their work and dedication - singers and instrumentalists. The music is indeed a most vital and serious part of every church service.

However quite often, doing what comes naturally, I get off the serious and find myself rambling on about music in a light, frivolous manner. Someone foolishly suggested that I record some of the "frivolity" for posterity--and this column is the only kind of shot I have

at any sort of posterity!

For instance, I often take note of the fact that in some of our Baptist churches, especially the smaller ones, it seems that women have to do all the singing. They can't get the men folks to cooperate and participate and choirs are quite often totally female. I like to cajole the men in this situation, and say to the women, "You ladies look good and sound good, all right - but I've always contended that a bunch of hens cackling sound a lot better with a rooster or two crowing in there somewhere!"

The late Dr. R. G. Lee, Prince of Preachers, used to say, "You can't make a nightengale out of an old buzzard by giving him a roost in the choir," but I think if you can get the male rascal to come down to the barn, give him a spot on the roost, anyhow. I'd rather see an old buzzard flapping his wings and croaking in the choir than to see an empty chair and realize that "no man would even give it a try." Buzzard sounds are better than no sounds - and all the Bible requires of us is "to make a joyful noise unto the Lord" - not produce an opera!

And I like to tell folks that my good wife is a public school music teacher, and has been for years - the last 20 in the same school. However, I point out that she wasn't always a music teacher, for she got her college degree in Home Economics at Meredith College and taught Home Economics for a while.

But I have to further note that after she married me, I increasingly became such an emaciated, skinny source of public embarrassment for a Home Economics teacher, she changed fields - looked as if she didn't know what a decent biscuit was with the sickly likes of me running around by her side!

She always adds, though, "Yea, you let someone hear you try to sing - and I'll have to change again!"

Well, I'm such a musical "buzzard" that I can't even finagle a roost in the rear balcony, muchless in the choir - so she's safe.

SOUL READING

It has been said that "the eyes are the windows of the soul," inferring that you can look into a person's eyes and take a reading on soul content. That may be true in some cases, but it certainly isn't in regard to a

woman's eyes--when they are full of tears. When a woman cries, she pulls the shades on her soul, locks the door, and a mere man can never know just what's going on down in there.

I've seen my wife of 42 years cry on several occasions, and I've badly misread her soul in a number of cases, even though I was looking right square into her tear-filled eyes.

Early in our marriage, in November, 1944, we were involved in a wreck at Robersonville that could have been worse than it turned out. I was taking her to the high school, where she taught, traveling slowly along a street with a railroad to my left, when a loaded school bus, breaking every law on the books, came ka-splitting through a stop sign, right on across the railroad without slowing, and plowed into our car. It pushed us sideways across the road and into a telephone pole before stopping, pinning us from both sides - with the telephone pole trapping the wife on the right and the school bus sitting in my lap on the left. The car folded like a loose accordion, with the dashboard, the chassis and seats buckling up into an inverted "V."

Leaning awkwardly against the tilted window, the wife sat stunned and shocked for a moment - then the tears burst forth in trembling torrents, and I was sure she was badly injured. I shook off my own shock and scrambled over to her as quickly as I could. Just as I put a concerned arm about her to fearfully inquire of her painful condition, she wailed pitifully, "Oh, Cleve - just look at our poor new car!"

And here in Kinston, 37 years later, in her wifely grace, she was serving me a cup of hot coffee, when she lost all semblance of grace, tripped over her own heel, half stumbled toward me, and rudely delivered the coffee in one big torrid splash all over me. They heard me yelp plumb down in New Bern, and I jumped so mightily that I bumped my noggin on the ceiling. I sure don't want to go to that lower region if it's any hotter than I got there for a spell!

Still holding the cupless saucer, she stood there trembling like a flapping flag, eyes wide with horror at all my frantic gyrations - then she puckered up and let go with the tears - full and free.

Ignoring the rising blisters, I tried to comfort and calm her. "I'm still living, honey," I insisted, "I'm all

right - not hurt much - just stings a little - don't worry - I'm fine."

She kept right on with the tears, looked about with misty vision, then with a helpless gesture, sobbed with evident deep regret, "And I just mopped the kitchen floor and washed that tablecloth - and besides, I'll just never get all those stains out of your good white shirt!"

A TO Z

Churches have a slogan which proclaims "The Family That Prays Together Stays Together," while Recreation Departments pronounce with equal fervor "The Family That Plays Together Stays Together."

Well, my good wife and I certainly do a lot of praying and playing - but seldom together. Due to the nature of my work through the years, I've been on the road a lot, and out of 42 years of married life we figure we've actually lived together for about 16 years. We don't fight much! Praying and playing together is a rare experience for us, and we largely, it seems, pretty much live our own lives, and occasionally "meet along the way." I tell folks I come home every now and then and rudely interrupt my wife's routine - but no happier couple inhabits the earth north or south. It seems that what we do best together is what we do separately. It works, somehow.

But about five years ago, on a rare occasion we had to "play together," she beat the living tar outta me in a prolonged game of Scrabble - greatly wounding my manly pride - and I demanded a rematch. "Anytime, anywhere you say," she cooed smugly.

I've been trying to arrange revenge ever since, and haven't extracted it yet, but I made a valiant effort recently. I finally hit a lull in the schedule where I had a whole week at home, no night meetings, and sharpened my wordy wits for a great win by reading the dictionary straight through from "A" to "Z." She teaches school all day, but I thought surely I'd get her at the word board one night after supper sometime during the week.

I challenged her the first thing at supper on Monday night, anxious to get at it. "Sorry," she replied matter-of-factly, "but I promised to go to a concert with some friends tonight."

Tuesday, I flung out the glove again. She answered, "This is my P.T.A. night at school. I have to play for the program."

Wednesday night we did go to Prayer Meeting together at our church, but dog if she didn't "have to stay for choir practice and a long Sunday School Class meeting afterwards."

Thursday at the evening meal, desperately, I sassed with a fresh challenge. "Sorry," she iterated, with a grin, "I have a county teachers' meeting tonight - being president of the organization, I have to be there, of course."

Friday night's repast saw me putting salt into my peppery affront as I taunted her, calling her a coward, and accusing her of deftly dodging the inevitable. "Not tonight, either, dear," she replied, "I have to teach a mission study over in Goldsboro."

I clapped my hands to my head in a gesture of utter resignation and frustration.

"Don't be so bothered," she teased, "you can get a shot at me. Tomorrow is Saturday and I don't have a thing on tap for the night. So there!"

"Sorry," I mournfully replied, "I have to light out up state in the morning for a revival beginning Sunday morning."

Oh well - anybody got any use for some "oorali," or a "yuk," or a "zygo" or even a "quagga?" I can even give you some "Speiss" to pack in your "uvula." I'm loaded!

DILLY DALLYING

For some folks it's often difficult to buckle down and just do "what the situation calls for," especially if prospective action bodes unpleasant encounters and experiences - they fight off the inevitable, shirk duties, postpone decisions, avoid realities, and dilly-dally at everything.

But not all people dilly-dally, thank goodness, or no great and daring things would ever be accomplished in this world, and everyone would be encased in a sheltering web of inactivity. My wife's father, the late Reverend H.M. Stroup, Sr. of Spruce Pine, was the least dilly-dallying man I ever knew or met. He never once got around to dilly, muchless dally, about anything. There wasn't a

lazy capillary in his whole physical system. If he spilled something, he'd start wiping at it on the way down - or if he broke something, it was fixed the next minute and working like new - and there was absolutely nothing he couldn't fix. He never backed off from a job or challenge - no matter how threatening, discouraging, or painful.

Typical of his immediate response to a difficult situation was his conduct and spirit during and following a fire at 3 a.m. in January, 1961, which resulted in the total destruction of his busy workshop, where he hand-crafted grandfather clocks, and which provided the bulk of his income during retirement years. He assisted in the final putting down of the fire, of course, but lost everything in the shop - all machinery and materials. But he didn't go back to bed, though weary in body, until he had sat down and wrote out refund checks to people who had made deposits on orders with him that couldn't now be filled - then crawled into bed at 4:45 p.m. singing in a loud, deep voice, "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow." At 7 a.m. he was down at the shop clearing things away and getting ready to rebuild!

Reminds me of a little bare-footed tyke I came upon on the campus at Kennedy Home once. I stopped and stared at his pitiful looking legs, which were covered from knees to ankles with all sorts of livid welts, knots and bumps - red, yellow and blue.

"My, son," I remarked, stooping to take a close look, "you have quite a case of poison oak there, don't you?"

"Partly," he replied, grinning.

"There's something else, too?" I asked.

"A few mosquito bites in there, I reckon," he replied.

"Anything else? You look like you've been through a sausage grinder and hung out to cure," I joked lightly.

"I guess a few red bugs are dug in somewhere, and I know some fleas got in some licks down at the barn," he answered brightly.

"What in the world are you doing for all those nasty welts and bites?" I pressed - solicitously, rising from my stoop.

"Well," he came back smartly, "they itch like the dickens and I'm scratching like mad!"

And I guess that's what I'm trying to say, folks, after all: When it itches - scratch!

Some of the sweetest, best adjusted, happiest, and most productive women I know here and there are so-called "Old Maids." I certainly don't think it's a mortal sin if a girl chooses not to marry - especially in light of some of the available prospects!

Nevertheless, if, for whatever reason, a woman doesn't get married, sooner or later she has to run the gamut of sharp barbs tossed by comedic buffs aimed at "old maids" and their manless state. She has been described as a most "singular thing," and has been accused of only knowing how to laugh with "he, he, he;" while the French novelist Balzac once wrote, "When there is an old maid in the house, a watchdog is unnecessary," implying, of course, that she was ever on the alert and prowl for a man, and ready to pounce on whatever showed up, day or night. And there is even the traditional American card game of "Old Maid" with its sour-puss, threatening sister staring out at you, ready to wreak havoc whenever she shows up - you're in real trouble and a sure loser when you get stuck with the "Old Maid."

Minnie Pearl, television's and radio's desperately man-hungry gal from Grinder's Switch, once said she knew an old maid from Grinder's Switch who solemnly decreed in her will that she strictly wanted female pallbearers at her funeral, writing, "If all those men wouldn't carry me out whilst I was living, I sure don't want them a-doing it after I'm dead!"

Minnie Pearl, who in reality is happily married, of course, is also the one responsible for that well-known and comforting remark, "I'm not an old maid, but just at the moment happen to be an unclaimed blessing."

Also, there's the story of a certain old maid in a small village who went down to the only furniture store in town and asked to see some sturdy sets of twin beds. She was busily inspecting them, when the nosy clerk, knowing her well, facetiously inquired, "Now, Jean, what in the world would someone like you, living alone all these years, ever want with twin beds?"

"Well, John," she replied promptly, "I happen to be one of those touchy, suspicious critters who stoops and looks under the bed every night to see if there's a man hiding under there - and at this stage of life, I want to double my chances!"

Along the same line, there's the case of the old maid who heard a strange noise at night, flipped on the light, and here came a masked robber through the window, one leg already juttied through, but who quickly started to withdraw when the light hit him. But the old maid promptly pointed a gun at him, cocked it, and intoned persuasively, "Come on in, fellow, or I'll shoot!"

Maybe the ultimate answer lies in author Edna Ferber's remark that "being an old maid is like the last stage of drowning - it's a pleasant sensation after you quit struggling!"

SEPARATED TOGETHER

I saw a cartoon recently that depicted a surly couple seated at the breakfast table, sipping coffee, and looking as if they hadn't slept a wink all night. The sour-pussed husband was saying laconically to his passive wife, "I know we're married, but I still think we're spending too much time together!"

Well, I don't believe I could ever say that to my good spouse, as we probably don't spend enough time together, muchless too much. I've been "on the road" most of my life, and out of 41 years of marriage, Nancy and I have been apart more than together, I'm afraid. Some marriages are kinda like cold melted cheese that settles down into a shapeless glob of sameness - but not mine. Nancy and I are still very much in love and thrill at the infrequent sight of each other, and act like two giddy teenagers at our meetings. And it shows!

While in West Virginia, where we spend about half our time these days, we live in a trailer on the side of a hill (everything in West Virginia is on a hill), and just below us is the trailer of our landlords, Bill and Faye Bowen, who also have had a long, sustained marriage. Bill is a crusty retired industrial worker and thin, pert Faye really knows how to handle him. They say that they haven't been separated a night in their lives, except during hospital stays, and don't intend to be; so they're certainly different from us in that respect.

However, that difference came into sharp focus the other day following a certain incident, and being together every day for 40 years may exact a toll along certain lines.

I had been away in a meeting for a week and drove into the driveway above the trailer. At the sound of the car, Nancy burst through the front door, down the steps, around the trailer and up to the car as I was getting out and warmly greeted me with a wifely hug and kiss. We walked back down to the trailer holding hands, making goo-goo eyes at each other like two sick goldfish, and my excited heart was going pit-a-pat like an old steam locomotive chugging upgrade in the Rockies. Every arrival at home, whether in West Virginia or Kinston, is a fresh, invigorating experience.

Later, when we visited Bill and Faye, old rumpty Bill huffed up and said, with a teasing tone, eyeing Nancy, "I saw Nancy run out like a frisky colt to greet you when you drove up this afternoon - you really have her under your thumb, don't you, brother!"

"Just in love," I answered brightly, still holding her hand, "and I'd move faster than that to greet her if she came driving up after a week's absence."

Faye, looking over at Bill with a sly, almost disdainful glance, said mockingly, "Why, If I stayed gone for six whole months, drove up, and Bill came a-running out the door toward me like that, I'd grab a tire tool for defense, run behind the car, and look for foam around his mouth, for I'd know for dead sure the rascal had done come down with hydrophobia - or something worse!"

Seems separation really keeps things together!

MULE TRADE

Mother-in-law trouble, in story and song, is supposed to be the inherited lot of every poor, harrassed married man - and quite often is, but there are plenty of exceptions to the usual rule. Not every husband has a nosy, nit-picking, demanding, interfering mother-in-law who thinks her perfect daughter made the world's biggest mistake. I didn't, for I came into possession of the sweetest, kindest mother-in-law in all creation - and I know for a surety that my son's wife has the greatest mother-in-law on the living earth!

Nonetheless, every mother-in-law suffers from the traditional image of "The Protagonist" in a man's marriage. The old definition of a "dilemma" as being "when a man stands by and watches the mother-in-law going

over a cliff in his brand new Buick" is typical - as is the fellow who had his dog's tale cut off because he didn't want the slightest hint of welcome to show when his mother-in-law was due for a visit. Old "Kingfish," whose losing battles with his domineering mother-in-law on the famous "Amos and Andy" show were comedic masterpieces, once ruefully remarked, "Ah wish dat mother-in-law uf mine had knobs on her ugly face like a T.V. set - den maybe ah could tune out all dem distortions!"

A recent issue of "Grit" resurrected a tale that has been around since the Stone Age, but which still illustrates the point at hand - that mothers-in-law are a much maligned lot, indeed.

This farmer's mother-in-law came for a visit, got too close to the flying heels of a bucking mule, and most unfortunately received a fatal blow to the head from a powerful hoof.

Friends and neighbors came from miles around to offer condolences and help make arrangements for the funeral. A stranger driving by, seeing all the cars and folks, thought maybe an auction was afoot so stopped to investigate. It was a warm spring day.

He noticed the farmer sitting under a tree closely surrounded by dozens of other men who buzzed about him like a hive of bees. When informed of what had happened, he remarked, with admiration in his voice, "My, he must be well-known and loved in these parts to get all that sympathy."

"Sympathy, heck," said his informer, "those men are bidding on that kicking mule!"

But the most bizarre, macabre, and perhaps most distasteful, tale I ever heard came in over a Charlotte radio station several years ago. This man's mother-in-law went on a solo fishing trip out in Chesapeake Bay, the boat overturned, and she was missing for over three days.

Finally, they called him to say they had recovered the body and needed instructions of where and how to deal with it, but adding, "We're sorry to say that the body was in the water so long that dozens of big blue crabs have attached themselves to it."

"In that case," instructed the son-in-law, "just send me the crabs - and reset her!"

The husband-wife relationship is the subject of much light-hearted joking and jesting - with the poor, harassed husband usually on the blunt end of things one way or another, especially on the part of the nation's cartoonists who treat with the subject in their offerings.

Bill Hoest with his "The Lockhorns" is one of my favorites, as he constantly depicts poor Lockhorn on the pointed horns of his eternal dilemma with his dominating wife, Loretta. He never seems to win, though he gets in some good licks all along.

One cartoon recently showed Loretta surrounded by several girl friends, who were apparently contending and pleading with her on a certain vital matter. Lockhorn stood by, hands jammed in pockets, and a look of disgust on his scowling face as he said, "It's no use girls - once Loretta has made up her mind, nothing in the world can keep her from changing it."

In another, Loretta stands with a hand on the opened front door, looks back at Lockhorn, who stands there with a grimace on his features, and caustically invites, "It's such a lovely day - why don't we bicker outside?"

And Lockhorn's constant losing struggle with Loretta was clearly shown in a frame showing him standing at the counter in a drug store, earnestly pleading with the clerk, saying, "Well, if you can't sell me the poison, could you give me something that would produce a permanent case of laryngitis?"

Also, various cartoonists get a lot of humorous mileage out of the traditional conflict, interference, and jealousy between the stay-at-home wife and her working husband's pretty secretary down at the office. My ribs rattled at one instance depicting an old female battleax lurking at the locked door of her husband's office, umbrella in hand and ear to door, opinionating at what was going on beyond between her husband and his young secretary by insisting, "She's probably in there running her fingers through his bald head."

Well, there's certainly no jealousy and conflict in my own marriage, but I could draw some cartoons from it just the same. Nancy embroidered, framed, and hung on the kitchen wall for me to constantly see a motto that declares in bold stitchery "Husbands Are Homemade." Bless her heart, she tries hard with what she has to work, and

never gives up.

Recently we drove up to a church in West Virginia where I was to sermonize, parked, got out and walked side by side toward the church, with me ambling along in my usual gawky gait.

All of a sudden she gave a concerned wifely chuck on the back between my pointed shoulder blades, and sternly directed, "Straighten up your shoulders, Cleve - you look like a lazy, stooped old man."

"There's a mighty good reason for that," I came back, trying painfully to comply with her demand.

"What?" she asked, chucking again - and then plum whopping me.

"I AM a lazy, stooped old man!"

CLIP JOINT

My industrious and talented wife of 42 years, Nancy, is a retired Home Ec.-Music Teacher, and can cook, sew, knit, play, and sing like a whole work crew on the mighty Mississippi. But in conjunction with all these activities, she is also a "rabid clipper." She has dulled out several pairs of scissors through the years clipping away at two things in particular - coupons and recipes. This is not too different from most busy housewives, I suppose, who like to save and cook, so I'm certainly not inferring that my wife is "strange" - most women are rabid clippers of coupons and recipes!

Nancy started building her recipe files early in life under the influence and guidance of a great cooking mother, and continued to add to them during college days studying Home Ec. at Meredith College in Raleigh, while the subsequent years of teaching, marriage and family, have plumb bloated the files.

Now, after all these years of snipping and saving she has enough recipes on hand to publish forty cook books and to make me as fat as the King of Siam in her culinary prime - all except food doesn't "take on me" too well, and I remain as thin as a Nile River bullrush right on into my dotage. But I think that one reason for all of Nancy's frantic clipping is the fond hope of eventually discovering some miraculous dish that will suddenly put some decent meat on her husband's gaunt bones. I eat good!

Every paper, book, magazine, journal, or flyer that passes through her hands gets a minute searching for new recipes, and the scissors come out a-flying like a Dutch windmill. Her regular files are long since stuffed beyond measure and capacity, and you can find recipes stuck around most anywhere in the house. Casseroles, puddings, cakes, pies, creams, candies, cookies, breads, salads, meats, and whatever else is edible in the wide world is represented several times over with recipes somewhere in her varied repertoire.

However, over a year ago, I did some fancy clipping myself - an "Andy Capps" comic strip, and taped it to a cabinet door by the refrigerator for her to see. It's still there, and is a source of fun to everyone who comes into our kitchen, as I make sure they see it.

It depicts the daunt Andy, half inebriated as usual, sitting cross-legged on a bench against the wall in his favorite pub, reading the paper. A pretty young thing across the way asked, "May I borrow your paper, sir?" Rising and looking at her over his red nose, he hands the paper to her and says, "you can just keep it, deary," and turned to walk up to the bar.

At the bar, his good friend, Chalkie, asks, with a worried look on his face, "Andy, didn't I hear your wife, Flo, tell you to save that paper as there was a recipe in it she wanted to clip?"

Came back Andy smartly, "Oh, that's O.K., Charlie, no woman ever lives long enough to try all the recipes she clips out o' papers!"

THE HE-MAN

Being reared in a strict Children's Home, I was taught to say "Yes, sir and No, sir" (as well as No, maam and Yes, maam") to my elders and superiors, or else pay the penalty of a burning cheek on the spot. I remained most meek, polite and submissive.

However, I thought maybe when I grew up and became a man I'd have the joy of being in situations where someone would "Yes, sir and No, sir" me for a change, and I could go around with my chest out, exuding importance, and "feeling my oats" - dominating things like a Roman tyrant.

Alas, fate played a dirty trick on me, and I didn't grow into enough of a man to dominate two fighting doodle

bugs, ending up as a weak stack of meatless bones; and for the sake of survival, I've just largely remained a "Yes, sir and No, sir" in most situations all my life - even within family relationships, where a man is supposed to be a man!

First there was my preacher father-in-law, who from the very moment I first saw him cowed me into polite, trembling submission with his deep gruff voice, glaring eyes, and stern demeanor; and I didn't say anything to him but "Yes, sir" for over 45 years, even though he turned out to be the softest tenderest, most loving man a fellow ever met. But first impressions are hard to overcome, and the first time I met him I thought the Bull of Bashan had gotten loose.

Second, when I became a father-in-law myself 15 years ago, I thought maybe I could even things out and have a meek son-in-law bowing and scraping to me. But I be-dog my oldest daughter hauled off and married a husky Marine from the hills of Kentucky, with precise military training, a veteran of jungle warfare in Vietnam, an expert rifle shot, former footballer with biceps like the suspension cables on the Golden Gate Bridge, and a hairy chest like the underside of an army tank, and I "Yes, sir, No, sir" him like forty when my puny measly mess is in the presence of his potent mighty mass.

Third, now comes the second generation, and I'm no better off, and I'm forced into a "Yes, sir and No, sir" situation with my 11-year-old grandson, Keith, no less! The little rascal has done earned a Black Belt in Karate out in Kentucky! I read of a 9-year-old up in New York having a Black Belt, but Keith is probably the youngest in Kentucky history to pull that trick - quite a tremendous accomplishment for a little blonde-headed 11-year-old, I think.

In his final tests on the way to the belt, he tripped up and handled a big 19-year-old three times his size, and I suppose he can split boards, snap bricks, bend backs, break necks, and all that other horrendous stuff Black Belters can do. It's awesome.

When he came with the family for visiting during the Christmas Holidays, I promptly told him sternly, "Now, Keith, if you misbehave or break something around here, I'm gonna give you a good spanking...then run like the dickens!"

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KENTUCKY MAN

Fifteen years ago when my oldest daughter, Lou, acquired a big, husky, Kentucky-bred husband, she also acquired lovely and loving in-laws - Mr. and Mrs. (Lovine) Ernest W. McWhorter of Middleburg in large Casey County.

Unfortunately, Ernest passed away on July 19, 1982, at age 66, and Lovine carries on bravely and alone in the homeplace, blessed somewhat by the fact that Lou, Don, and the four grandbabies are only 60 miles away up in Richmond, and their frequent visits help fill the aching void in her life. Don is her only child - and about as spoiled as last year's sweet taters!

But Ernest McWhorter was a unique and unusual man in so many ways, and though my contacts with him were rare and infrequent, I grew to love and appreciate him beyond words and measure.

He spent his entire life in his beloved Kentucky, and was widely known, loved, and respected, as evidenced by the attendance at his funeral in the Middleburg Baptist Church - an overflow crowd. He was a field representative for Stanford Creamery for years, and regularly traveled most of eastern Kentucky, making friends all over, being the most friendliest of fellows himself.

He was a genuine Christian and Churchman, living the simple Christian life daily and serving the Lord regularly through the Middleburg Church. He led the singing in the church for years (as his father had done before him), taught Sunday School classes, served as deacon, and on about every committee for anything the church ever elected or appointed. He especially loved the singing, and could "really go at it" with zip and gusto, and could play by ear most any kind of musical instrument you might put into his hands.

He also was a woodsman - hunter and fisherman - of the first order, and could shoot a gun straighter than the line between east and west. He seldom missed, whether the target or prey was immobile, flying, running, or climbing. He kept and raised his own dogs, an original Kentucky bloodline called "Walker Fox Hounds," which are among the world's finest hunting dogs. He raised some cows and hogs, too, to keep the dogs company, and planted a small acreage of burley tobacco, as well as maintaining a large vegetable garden.

His pleasant face was formed into a permanent smile,

and he exulted in good jokes, colloquialisms, mountain lore, and old sayings. He could carry on from sun-up to sun-down with "mess and stuff" that tickled you blue and pink, like indicating knowingly, "If you want a job half done, send one boy - if you don't want it done a-tall, send two boys," or, "If you throw a rock at a pack of dogs, the one that howls is the one you hit," or again, "All men are ignorant about some things, but I hate to see a man who is ignorant - and proud of it."

He was a faithful husband, a great father, and, like me, a doting granddaddy. He is, and always will be, sorely missed by all of us. But he lives on in his son, Don, who looks like him, walks like him, talks like him, thinks like him, sings like him, acts like him, shoots like him -- and eats like him!

THE GREAT BULL

Southern Baptist women really believe in and study missions through their "Woman's Missionary Union" organizations in thousands of churches, working under the general auspices of the national headquarters out of Birmingham, Alabama, filtering down through state, associational, and local organizations to reach every Baptist woman in every Baptist church.

In March every year they study, promote, pray for, and give to Home Missions through the "Annie Armstrong" missions offering - and in December they repeat the process for Foreign Missions through the "Lottie Moon" missions offering.

To promote these special offerings, they produce an astounding amount of resource materials - study course books, maps, charts, graphs, pictures, tracts, folders, letters, slides, film strips, posters, calendars, and I don't know what all; but if a person digests all this material, he really has a good grasp of missions in any given area. That's the whole idea - the women first inform and challenge, pray, then give. It works!

At the heart of the matter is the "Mission Study," based on a specially prepared book each year and utilizing all those other materials to implement and enhance knowledge. The women come together to study as local churches, groups of churches or even associational groups - under the leadership of an excellent teacher, local or

imported.

One of those good teachers for hundreds of studies through the years has been my mission-minded wife. She's bound to be "Miss Missions Study U.S.A.," for I know of no woman who has prepared and taught more mission studies for over 40 years than she has - and is still at it today, both in North Carolina and up in West Virginia.

I've taught hundreds of study courses, too, all over, but my forte is "Bible Study" - history and theology - and I'm not too hot on the missions studies and avoid them where possible.

However, I recall one incident when I became a W.M.U.er - reluctantly. Nancy had taught the annual foreign missions study in this Burlington church for three straight years, and they wanted her for a fourth.

But she told them, "Maybe you ought to try something new this year - Cleve teaches study courses, so why not ask him?"

They roped me into it, and I got the study book plus the plethora of all those other materials, waded through them, put something together, and did the best I could for the good sisters.

But a few months later one of the fine sisters called to inquire about getting either of us to teach the course again for the fifth year. I told her I probably couldn't do it, and she'd have to ask Nancy.

"Oh, that's fine," she cooed, "we had already decided to go back to Mrs. Wilkie this year, anyhow, if possible. She gives us good, warm, fresh milk - all we got from you was a lot of bull!"

"Well, dear sister," I cooed back, "if you Baptist gals don't know the difference between a cow and a bull, you never will find just what you want!"

**JUST
LOOKIN'
AROUND**



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SPEED'ER UP

Everyone who drives is well aware of the fact that the speed limit on the highway is set by law at 55 MPH - signs, newspapers, radio, T.V., and law officers are constant reminders, and no driver could plead "ignorance of the law" in any court in case of violation.

Exceeding the speed limit is one of our great national crimes, of course, especially in light of the present and serious energy crunch. And some drivers seem bent on burning up over night all the gas Saudia Arabia can ship over here as they turn our highways into open race tracks. A Christian should be wary at this point, for "we're all tempted" - especially busy, harried, over-scheduled preachers!

But sometimes grossly exceeding the speed limit isn't the real problem in some cases, as many patrolmen will testify as they seek to enforce "the total law" relative to driving.

A Charlotte columnist (Doug Collins), for instance, recently reported on a patrolman who stopped a rattling, loose, chugging heap that seemed to be a threat to public safety, as well as to the ancient, chancy driver. Various tests on the old crate proved his point. It was a real safety hazard, especially in the brakes - it didn't have any! The pedal went plumb to the floor when the officer pressed it.

Trying to impress the intrepid driver with the seriousness of the situation, the officer asked, "Do you know just how many feet it takes to stop a car traveling at 50 miles per hour, friend?"

"No, sir, I sure don't," replied the non-plussed driver, "this here thing ain't never made it up to 50 miles per hour!"

Then there's the case of my good friend and fellow church member, the late and greatly beloved R. N. Scott of Kinston. Well into his eighties, Brother Scott was going down the road one Sunday afternoon to New Bern to see some friends. Having been everywhere and seen everything in his time, he was in no hurry to get anywhere; so he was bouncing along in his old Chevy at about 30 miles per hour on busy Highway 70. Despite screeching brakes and tooting horns behind him occasionally, Mr. Scott held his pace, and let everybody scoot around him at gathering high speed every chance they got, ignoring their impatient,

insulting gestures. Everybody left him behind with "burning rubber and a cloud of dust."

But a patrolman finally came broadside and pulled him over, intending to cite him for impeding traffic.

After examining his license, the officer asked, "Mr. Scott, do you really know why I stopped you?"

"Sure, I know," replied Mr. Scott, not blinking an eye.

"Then tell me just why," pressed the patrolman.

"I was the only one out here you could catch!"

LOSING OUT

Having been on the road so much in forty years, I've crossed paths and swords with various Highway patrolmen here and there for this that, and the other - a little of this, some of that, and a whole mess of the other - but none of it too serious, Thank Goodness.

One memorable encounter with a particular intrepid Patrolman occurred 15 years ago down at Havelock when I was in a revival at the Baptist Church. I took a slow drive down the road a few minutes before church time one night "to get my mind and thoughts together."

A couple of miles from town, I saw a long line of cars stopped up ahead, with flashing lights of patrol cars on hand, and I surmised there had been a wreck and the road was blocked. I stopped, maneuvered on the shoulder, turned around, and headed back to Havelock as I didn't want to get tied up in a traffic jam and be late for the services. Time was already getting short.

But in a jiffy, here came a patrol car, lights flashing, siren going full blast, and pulled me over before I'd gone 40 feet. The husky Patrolman approached with his flashlight, shined it into my car, looked things over carefully, then said in a sonorous voice, "let me see your license." I sat there like a frozen toadstool, with my sticky tongue cleaving to the roof of my dry mouth, but I managed to fish out my license. There weren't any pictures on licenses back then, so he checked out the statistics pretty carefully with his light right in my thin face.

"We're running a license check back yonder, fella. Why did you turn around? What you got in the trunk of this car? Let me see," he demanded, stepping back to let

me get out of the car.

I let him look at my spare tire and golf clubs, but he searched for a false bottom in the trunk, and sniffed the air real good.

When I got back in, he asked, "You own this car? Let me see your registration card."

I forked that out, and he found everything in order there, but he continued, "I still want to know why you turned around and ran."

"I wasn't running - I just had to get to church on time."

"Whatta you doing going to church on Thursday?" he wanted to know, handing my registration card back to me - eyeing me still.

I explained to him that I was preaching in a revival at Havelock, and that it was time I got along.

"You a preacher?" he asked incredulously.

"Sure am, despite how I look - and I aim to do some preaching tonight if you'll let me," I answered, trying to smile.

"Where's your sermon?" he wanted to know further.

"In my head - I don't use notes. Here's my Bible," I said, holding it up, "that's some positive evidence, isn't it?"

"I stopped a bank robber last week who had a Bible in his car, so that doesn't say too much," he came back.

"Well, I read and obey the 8th commandment, at least."

"What's your topic for tonight?" he tested me.

"Detours on Life's Highway," I answered, tongue in cheek now.

He grunted, withdrew his light, and finally reluctantly, let me go, and I took off.

Well, that suspicious rascal came tearing up behind me in the church yard and gave me a ticket right there for speeding - after I frantically tried to keep from being late for church on account of him! You win some and lose some!

MESSY MALIBU

An axiom of life is that the past colors the present and the old influences the new, especially where cars are concerned.

In nearly forty years of driving, I've "gone through" several cars, mostly comfortable, but gas-eating, Pontiacs. But a couple of years ago my employer (Baptist State Convention of NC) started leasing cars for its staff. I passed the Pontiac on to my good wife and crawled into a Convention beet-red Chevrolet Malibu. I stuck with that bloody thing for two years, 60,000 miles, and a million frustrations.

It always got me there and back and didn't explode on me, but I had to learn to live with its foibles and faults, which were "as the sands of the sea." The glass in the right door would stick every time I tried to lower and raise the window, and rattled like a shelf of stacked china during an earthquake. The cruise drive wouldn't hold steady, fluctuating up and down a ten-mile scale. A new transducer and several trips to the garage didn't do any good, and I finally had to forego the luxury of cruise drive and keep my tired foot glued to the accelerator on long trips.

And the compressor on the air conditioner was something else, indeed. It never did function quietly, and got worse rather than better. I just adapted to the noise after several attempts to silence it, including some new parts. It ground and whirred like a grist mill in full operation, and you could hear me coming five miles off. I had to shout to carry on a conversation with a passenger. I expected it to blow up any minute.

And the front seat adjustment mechanism was jammed tighter than a jar of fig pickles, and I just had to get used to riding in one position. It didn't have chrome trim around the doors and windows, including a "rain drain," and if I tried to crack a window for fresh air during a storm I'd end up with a water spout in my lap. I had to keep all windows tightly closed at all times when parked in case of rain, or I'd have to bail water for an hour.

And the trunk on that thing wasn't big enough for a "bread box," and I had to haul most of my junk and materials inside the car. I could carry on at length about the shortcomings of that Malibu!

However, I'm now in pure "hog heaven," for I turned in the Malibu for a nice, new, blue Impala - no noise, chrome trim everywhere, excellent cruise drive, easy rolling windows, and a big roomy trunk. Everything is perfect.

But my precise, scholarly, doctor son (PhD) came home from Brown University for a few days vacation, and took the new car for a spin. It was his first encounter with it.

You should have heard him listing and pointing out the things wrong with that Impala - bad paint job, tight doors, scraping windshield wipers, and on he went for half an hour. He had a list a mile long of things that "needed fixing" right away.

I just smiled, tore up the list, and said happily, "Boy, you just haven't driven a red Malibu for two years!"

SLOW'ER DOWN

The really smart and wise man, I suppose, is the one who can read "the signs of the times," and plot his course accordingly to safety and success. But if a person can successfully read and follow all the signs and signals we're surrounded by on every hand today, he sure has got me beat. At times, the plethora of multiple signs, flashing lights, bright billboards, and mechanical signals are most confusing to a one-track mind like mine. I guess existing conditions color and determine the exact meaning of any given sign, and you can't always take one for face value, pure and simple.

For instance, just yesterday out here on the edge of town I got in hot water with the very simplest of signs. I neared a large road crew working on repairs. As usual, they had a big hunk dug out of the road and were busy digging more, with the right lane blocked off.

One of those bare-waisted, sun-blackened geezers, with biceps like a race horse, stood on the left shoulder with a large metal sign directing traffic from both directions through the left lane and around the busy project. The sign was that familiar sort that reads "stop" on one side and "slow" on the other.

As I approached, he spun his sign around to the "stop" side and I had no trouble with that maneuver, as I full well knew what "stop" meant - and I did. I waited patiently while a long line of cars filed by from the other direction, with right lane traffic grinding to a halt behind me.

The big man finally flipped his sign to the "slow"

side, and I started inching around the working crew, being careful not to bump a particular portion of a workman as he bent over his diligent digging.

As I cautiously drew broadside to the burly sign holder, he flapped his arm, waved vigorously, and yelled right in my face through the lowered window, "Hurry it up, fella!"

I stopped almost dead at that, and demonstrated, "Your big sign there says 'slow'!"

"Well, it don't mean that cotton-picking slow, man!" he shot back. (That's a "preacher version" of what he actually said!)

"When is slow not slow?" I wanted to know.

"Well, we're busy here, fella, and traffic is piling up, so go slow fast!"

"If I go fast then it won't be slow, and I'd be disobeying your sign," I pressed.

"I ain't gonna be slow about getting you outta here fast!" he growled, approaching the car with that sign raised to the "stop" side, and his burnt skin getting pink from rising rage.

With the man coming and horns tooting behind me, things got thick; so I gunned my car and thinned them out considerably. I got away without a dent in my car or the deep imprint of "stop" or "slow" grooved into my soft noggin.

But I don't know yet exactly what that mean man meant when he waved a sign at me that said straight-forward and plain, "slow." It's the same dilemma a golf pro put me in several years ago when he was teaching me how to sock a golf ball. He said, "The secret lies in learning how to hit it hard easy!" I'm still working on that one, too!

FILL'ER UP

The veteran Highway Patrolman approached and kindly, with fatherly demeanor, greeted the anxious rookie who had been assigned to him for his first day of road duty.

"Now, son" said the oldster, "we want to get off to a good start, and I want to pay close attention to every detail - little things maybe, but your life may depend on them. I want to give you a basic lesson on total preparedness."

"Yes, sir," replied the rookie respectfully.

"First, before you go out, make sure of your proper dress - full uniform, with all protective devices in working order, especially your pistol, though I hope you never have to use it."

"Yes, sir, I have it all today - in good order."

"Fine. Now, Son, a patrol car is a very special vehicle and highly technical in many instances, so know your car. But, first just make sure it will start and run properly - get in and start this one."

The rookie eased under the wheel, hit the starter, and everything went perfectly.

"Open the trunk now," continued the vet, "and check out the spare tire and tools. Also, check the lights - front, rear, and inside. Look at the tires on the ground - kick em if you wish."

All went well up to that point - no trouble.

"Good," added the instructor, "now we're ready for the road - you doing the driving and I'll continue the instructions."

"You don't want to get far out before you make sure all your equipment is functioning properly. Even though our mechanics have checked everything, you want to do your own checking, too."

"How's that, sir?" asked the young man, turning a corner.

"Well, for instance, activate your radar and test it on a passing car or two. There, it's working. Now, touch the siren a brief second - not long, but just enough to make sure it's operative. Fine. Next, your blue light - check it out."

"All's well so far, sir."

"Other things are important, too," continued the oldster without letup, "such as forms for reporting, making tickets, pens, and pad, also. Check to see that you have a good flashlight, with spare batteries. Test your seat belt, try the heater and air-conditioning, even test the windshield washer and fluid."

"All in ship-shape, sir," came back the rookie, turning on everything he could reach, it seemed.

"And not the least by any means - check out your radio - that's your lifeline. Every little item counts and contributes to efficiency, enabling you to act quickly with no costly lost motion. Be ready at all times in every detail - leave nothing to chance!"

"Yes, sir," said the rookie, "I'll try to remember."

"Now," said the vet in short terms, "look at your radar - that car that just passed us was doing over 70 - turn around and go get him. We'll give you some first-hand experience right now."

The rookie whipped the car across the road to the opposite shoulder, and paused - listening.

"What's the matter? Time's wasting - Go!" urged the veteran.

"We can't, sir."

"And why not?"

"We're outta gas!"

LIPPING IT

My over-sized mouth has gotten me into much trouble quite often through the years, but recently I got my mouth into trouble - about putting the thing out of business.

Traveling east in Kentucky on Interstate 64, near Grayson, I stopped to offer assistance to an elderly man who stood on the shoulder beside his car, a big Lincoln Continental. He was dressed like a New York Executive, and I looked like something right out of the railroad yards, for I don't dress up when I travel.

He eyed me suspiciously, but said forlornly, "I have a flat tire, but I don't know how to change it - never did that sort of thing."

"I don't either," I replied, looking down at the extremely flat left front tire, "but maybe between us we might get the job done somehow." His wife sat inside the car, looking out disconsolately, trying to smile at me when our eyes met.

I got rocks under the wheels and the jack ready for the front bumper, then went to work on the rusty wheel lugs with a single-pronged, elongated lug wrench that looked like King Arthur's ex-caliber out of the sheath-that thing was a yard long if an inch.

With my first mighty tug, it slipped, flew up and popped me a stinging blow on the upper lip - blood gushed and a thick slab of ministerial lip meat the size of a quarter hung loose down over the right side of my mouth.

I held a handkerchief over it, staunched the blood flow, plugged the meat back into place, and we finished the job somehow, after a lot of ignorant struggling, mixed with blood and grease.

The stranded folks were Mr. and Mrs. Gerald E. Broughton of Huntington, West Virginia, where he recently retired from the presidency of "Consolidated Services, Inc." a consultant and brokers concern.

I followed him about 30 miles to his home on Enslow Boulevard, washed up, visited a while, then got his directions to nearby Cabell Huntington Hospital, where I entered the emergency room to see what could be done about my mangled lip - which was prime evidence of the fact that I really didn't know how to change a tire!

I ended up stretched out on an operating table, shot full of tetanus mess, drugged with pain killers, pumped full of penicillin, 14 stitches in my wounded lip, and a big, ugly bandaid stuck across the whole mess under my nose.

The next night I had to make a speech at Burke Memorial Church in Princeton, West Virginia, and showed up looking like the devil had done dealt with me and the Good Lord had punished me for all my collective sins, appearing like the sad loser in a fight between two wild tom cats. They had special prayer for me, but I don't think they got through - things didn't improve a bit.

I went ahead and made my speech, anyhow, telling the folks to shut their eyes, and the words fizzled out side-wise from the corner of my mouth over a blue, puffed lip that looked like a sick Ubangi tribesman with a fever blister.

Well, the words might have come out crooked, but what I said was straight. I guess it'd take more than a wicked West Virginia lug wrench going berserk on a Kentucky highway to shut completely my wide North Carolina mouth!

DON'T DO THAT

Seemingly small, insignificant things can all of a sudden, under certain circumstances, become mighty big, important - down-right threatening. Change comes quickly.

While traveling in West Virginia on the way to a speaking engagement, I left the main highway to go about a mile up into a certain town, which I'll not name, to look for dinner. I found full satisfaction in a shopping center restaurant, filled my craw with West Virginia ham, and headed back down the hill for the main highway.

On the way I decided to flavor the residue of the ham

with a sweet stick of Mr. Wiggley's juicy fruit gum - unwrapped the stick, crammed the gum into my ham-scented jaw, then inadvertently without thinking, cracked the car window and let the little wrapper go.

Well, wouldn't you know, right at that moment a county sheriff topped the hill 150 yards behind me, and even from that remote distance, the eagle-eyed rascal spied my little gum wrapper go floating off into the breeze and drift to a soft landing beside the road.

At the bottom of the hill, he waved me over to a stop in the parking lot of a small restaurant I had bypassed in my search for dinner and called me over for some friendly consultation.

He was a bright-faced, mustachioed fellow, but sternly informed me that they treated littering the highways in his county with less than favor and approval, and were right in the midst of a stepped-up campaign against it. They had even recently appointed a special "Clean County Committee" that like to talk to fellows like me who messed up their roadsides.

"In fact," he said further, "I have already used the computer to send in your license number and have radioed your actions to the committee - and they want me to hold you here until they can send a member out to give you a lecture, and possibly have me cite you."

I freely and humbly confessed my careless sins, told him who I was, and indicated that I was on the way to an important engagement where I was to do some lecturing myself, and that I would surely be late if I had to hang around for that committee's lecture.

He looked me over real good, thought a while, then said, "Well, if you'll go back up there and pick up that wrapper and bring it back to me, I'll let you go this time - I'll wait for you here - have a cup of coffee, maybe."

"Thank you, sir," I said, taking off immediately. I parked in the vicinity of the misdeed and looked like forty all over the creation - but no Wiggley wrapper. The wind, apparently, had carried it elsewhere. Ten minutes later I returned and approached the officer - warily. He had just come out of the restaurant, and stood by his car - and he was as big as one them mountains up there. I trembled a little.

"Do you have the wrapper?" he asked, eyeing a brown paper bag I held in my hand.

"I couldn't find it," I replied, ramming my hand

into the bag, "But though I couldn't find a Wriggley's juicy fruit wrapper, I cleaned up half your good county up there - I do have two spearmint wrappers, one peppermint, a couple paper cups, four bottle caps, three beer bottles, and a coke can!"

"Get outta here," he laughed, grabbing the bag.
I got!

AND THE ANGELS SANG

What I'm about to tell you folks in this column makes me appreciate Isaac Bashevis Singer, the famous Yiddish Poet Laureate, writer, and storyteller, who was quoted in the daily papers as saying that "Modern writers, in trying to change the world, are losing the ability to entertain. We need true stories, but we need also a person with imagination. When I was a little boy they called me a liar, but now that I'm grown-up, they call me a writer."

Well, I'm grown-up now, too, and try to write occasionally - but most folks still call me a liar!

Anyway, not long ago, I was chugging down Interstate 40 in my Citation, near Statesville, staying safely behind a long, red Buick ahead, when this faded green crate rattled past me at a loud clip. The young driver was shirtless and sported a dark, scraggly beard and a full head of frazzled, wind-blown, black hair, looking as if he were on the way to a rock concert. He was certainly set and intense on getting that car somewhere. It rattled like a rock slide, but moved along at a steady pace.

All I saw at the opened back window of the car on my side was a bare pair of big, dirty male feet hanging out in the rushing air. Some guy was lying on his back in the rear seat and giving his hot tootsies a good airing. With the help of air conditioning, I survived the passing.

When the flying feet drew broadside to the red Buick ahead, I thought for a moment there was going to be a touchy tangle. The Buick, with its lone male driver, eased over toward the center line and kept pace with the crate for a few seconds with just inches between them. I held my breath and slowed down a bit. The Buick maneuvered until the driver was flush with the rear window and its dangling feet.

Then out came a hairy, brown arm from the Buick and flying fingers reached and ticked those dirty feet for a

fleeting second, then the Buick slacked off and fell well behind the speeding crate.

From my distance, I never saw two large feet disappear quicker in my life, jerked inside, with the man turning a frantic flip backward on the seat, ending on his hands and knees, and staring round in utter bewilderment. He finally hung out the window, looking wide-eyed up, down, and all around like a McDonald's floating hamburger - but nothing was near him now.

They soon pulled into a rest-stop and the Buick sped on past. But I turned in and eased up beside the crate, trying not to smile. The two men got out and the tickled one was saying, "I tell you, Buddy, something invisible got me back there - no flying object - for it was soft and easy."

"Aw," came back the shirtless pardner, "that angel dust has done blown your mind, Fred - glad I stayed off it."

"That's it Buddy! That's it - an angel did it - had to be - nothing else in sight - a good angel flew down from heaven and caressed my feet - I'm blessed!" He was almost ecstatic as they moved away, looking lovingly down at his mysteriously blessed feet.

I didn't have the heart, or nerve, to tell him about that devil in the big red Buick!

SWEET RELIEF

According to all the nationwide advertising, "Roloids spell relief," but I got happy relief the other day in a manner that puts Roloids to shame.

I went up north of Cincinnati, Ohio, for a meeting and then hightailed it back to Charleston, West Virginia, for another meeting the next day. Traveling along Highway 35 approaching the confluence of the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers at Gallipolis and Point Pleasant, I became totally preoccupied with my windshield washer, trying to clean 40 million squashed Ohio bugs off my windshield so I could see the road, rivers and cities. I kinda forgot about my right foot for a moment, which inadvertently pushed my pace up beyond what I had the cruise gear set on for safe, legal driving--well, at least, that's a more plausible excuse than the weak theological one used by another speeding preacher when he reported, "My good man, I was

just fleeing from the devil!" (The patrolman came back, "Well, he caught you, sir!")

Anyway, when I suddenly met a patrolman, my right foot sho did recoup its memory right quick - but too late! He quickly turned around and the next thing I knew blue and yellow lights were flashing behind me like Halley's Comet in a tailspin, and I knew what he wanted - me - for nary another soul was in sight. I pulled over onto the swampy shoulder and waited for the sickening inevitable.

The husky trooper approached slowly, eyeing things carefully, a smile on his round, firm face - mine looked like a calcified mummy, frozen into a wrinkled wad of dismay. In an affable, gentle manner he informed me that he had clocked me slightly exceeding the legal limit, but wouldn't tell me exactly, so I really don't know yet the extend of my sins. I told him who I was, where I had been, where I was going - heartily congratulated him on the fine, colorful bug population they had in Ohio.

He took my license and returned to his car to record the facts. I got out and stood so I could get to my wallet and see if I had enough money left to pay my way around a speeding ticket and back across the river into West Virginia. I figured, at best, things were going to run mighty close. That's when indigestion set in!

He returned, that smile still on his clean-shaven features, and handed me a blue slip, advised me to drive carefully, and was gone.

Glory be! The blue slip turned out to be just "A Friendly Reminder," stating, "You have been observed committing a traffic violation. We ask you to consider this a friendly reminder to obey Ohio's traffic laws and caution you that a violation may result in a mandatory court appearance. Our mission is to make travel on Ohio highways as safe as possible. Your cooperation will ensure success."

I stiffened my limp legs, wiped my sweaty brow, patted my flat wallet, returned the now distant patrolman's cheery smile, lovingly stroked a big, fat, black Ohio bug that landed on my windshield, and tied up traffic on the bridge "creeping" back into West Virginia, in a most cooperative manner.

That good trooper was Sgt. L. L. Arledge, as nice a fellow as you ever met, and if he doesn't end up with some "stars in his crown," I'll see to it that at least he gets some new buttons for his uniform and a fresh bulb for his

blue light. He's forty times better than Roloids!

SEEING SHAVING SIGNS

Anyone who travels our highways is well aware of the plethora of posters, signs, and billboards that clutter our roadsides and block out scenery - getting thicker, bigger, and worse with each passing day. Some cities are beginning campaigns and making laws to ban, or at least sorely restrict, all billboards and signs around the premises.

A lot of them we could do without, I'm sure, but I'd hate to obliterate all of them, for I'd be plumb lost going into a big city without the signs, billboards, and advertisements as guidelines, and probably couldn't find gas, bed and board. My sense of direction is nil, so I need some helps and signs - but there are too many!

However, one thing that was withdrawn from this roadside clutter several years ago that I'd like to see back are those old familiar "Burma Shave Signs" that used to warn cajole, instruct, and entertain at regular intervals along roads all over the whole country. Reading the clever signs, set in sequences of four, used to be one of the joys of a long trip. Our family used to look for them and then read them aloud in unison, usually followed by gay laughter, for they were funny. It served to break the tiredness and tension of sustained driving, and put everybody in a good mood.

I remember taking a trip to Texas in the middle fifties, noting the signs all along, then when getting back home writing a piece in my associational bulletin "Seeing Shaving Signs in Seven States." I wanted to pull out the piece for this column, but my "files" won't cooperate, and I can't find it. But I'm so nostalgic about the things that I have no trouble recalling several of them, anyhow - so can still use them for the column. They even succeeded in getting me to use Burma Shave on my limp whiskers until I got lazy and went electric.

I remember one for instance, that hit the drunk driver right in midbrow, revealing, "Drinking drivers - nothing worse - they put the quart - before the hearse."

And another warned the speeding driver of some consequences of his haste, "Thirty days - hath September - April, June - and the speed offender."

A reminder of safe, cautious driving showed up in the one that stated, "Big mistake - many make - rely on horn - instead of brake."

And our children entered the picture with this solemn admonition, "At school zones - heed instructions - protect - our little tax deductions."

Tailgating is a most dangerous practice in driving, so a set of signs wondered, "Is he lonesome - or just blind - this guy who drives - so close behind?"

Also, young modern swain, if you want to survive to marry that pretty girl you're now courting, raise a family, enjoy your grandbabies and live happily ever after, you'd better heed this last sign. "We know how much - you love that gal - but use both hands - for driving, pal!"

Burma Shave, if you'll bring back your cute signs, I'll save up enough thin blood to grow a limp beard and get me a straight razor again!

ON THE WAY UP

I suppose I've been "up in the air" a million times in my short life over a lot of unnerving trivia such as spilled coffee, knotted shoe laces, cold pizza, and bugs on my beans - but only twice in this technical jet and rocket age have I been hoisted into the air with the loud aid of a roaring airplane.

Thirty years ago, in 1949, I let a persuasive fellow get me on a plane down in Texas for a jolting jaunt over Fort Worth and Dallas, and he had to return to Fort Worth to retrieve my stomach and put me back together. I was really shook up. I even kissed oily Texas soil when I stood on it again in one thankful piece. I don't want to be under, off, or above good solid dirt - I just want to be on it. Why, shoot fire, I can't even attempt to ride a horse without jumping off when he takes the first step!

That was more than enough flying for me until recently when, in my foolish old age, I held my breath, tightened my belt, shut my eyes, swallowed a bottle of dramamine, uttered a desperate prayer, and nervously crawled into one of them soaring contraptions for the second time - and stayed in the air about 1½ hours for the 200 mile round trip between Asheboro and Waxhaw.

The Wycliffe Bible Translators sent one of their fine

planes and pilots to fly a group of us down for a day at their JAARS (Jungle Aviation and Radio Service) operation at Waxhaw. The trip, tour, meal, and fellowship were mighty interesting, indeed. The men and women at JAARS are certainly sacrificially dedicated to the task of getting God's Word via plane and radio to dialect-speaking tribes in jungles all over the world. I was most impressed with the gigantic undertaking. They're succeeding against all odds.

I've seen about every inch of North Carolina from ground level, but this was the first time I had viewed a portion of it from the air - and I did open my eyes often enough to get a lingering, but stomach-churning, look at the beautiful countryside, plus the cities of Asheboro, Albemarle, Concord, and Monroe. We flew over the heart of the spectacular Badin Lakes country, and that was especially thrilling. The intriguing scenery almost made me forget how nervous I was.

I thoroughly enjoyed the brief trip, but I'm afraid I was about like the scared, shaky fellow who said after his first plan ride, "I just never did put all my weight down on that thing." It'll probably be thirty more years before I fly again - and by that distant time I expect Jesus to be the Pilot on a one-way trip. I'm going "up in the air" and never come down!

JUST LOOKIN' AROUND

In Restaurants



SHADES OF TUT

At Shoney's restaurant up in Princeton, West Virginia, while waiting for my hamburger, I got a big kick from observing various folks at the salad bar, as they fashioned their salads from a bar featuring "30 different items and all you can eat for \$2.50." Most of them piled it on like they never expected to see another salad bar.

I had about decided that a bearded, broad-bellied West Virginia coal miner had certainly created the ultimate in salads to satiate his apparent ravenous appetite--but then, here came a prim little grandmotherish, woman who out-did, out-maneuvered, and out-stacked the whole caboodle of scrounging saladists.

In all my long days, I never witnessed such adept expertise in operation on a simple, flat, wide saucer. You'd have thought there's no possible way for so much mess and junk to adhere to such a small, even, round surface - I'm sure Shoney's executives who designed and delegated such a dish for their salads never intended for so much of their groceries to stick to the things, either! That old gal must've been making salads from the Year One - she didn't miss a trick, or a single one of the thirty items.

She started with a small heap of lettuce in the middle--"scoonched" it up into a tight, high mound, leaving room all around the edges. She carefully placed big tomato slices all around the heap, leaving them hanging over to form a "sideboard." Then she spread cottage cheese over the tomatoes and patted it down into a flat base. Next came a liberal dose of cold macaroni, also firmly pressed down with a spoon. A big glob of finely grated slaw followed, and this was dressed off with a layer of beet slices. Spoons of bean relish were used to deck the beets, and the relish was spiced further by the addition of several petite pickles, stuck in upright at intervals to serve as supporting posts for more ingredients - which kept coming in torrential crescendo without a missing beat.

At this point, she had built up such a fence around the lettuce mound that she had room at the top for even more lettuce, which she backed up and stacked on, then returned to her outer structure. She dumped ground egg bits all over everything, and buried the egg under a shower of grated cheese, with the cheese being hidden by

spoonfuls of sprinkled bacon bits. Cracker crumbs and olives found resting places on top of all that.

By this time she was holding the plate down at arm's length, with the heap of goo soaring almost up beneath her chin, but she kept right on with the construction job like she was on over-time with double pay. She was doing such a fantastic job that even the hungry miner stood there staring at her, his mouth hanging open in sheer amazement, tinged with pure admiration.

Well, space won't permit full and detailed description of the entire massive operation, over which she dumped half a gallon of blue cheese dressing and topped it off with a final olive.

She ended up with a teetering mound that far out-did the ancient Egyptians and their gigantic pyramids--In fact if poor King Tut had been buried in that thing, they'd still be digging for him to this day!

CALL THE COOK

Back in the late fifties and early sixties one of my best travelling companions was red-headed Guy Cain, long retired from the work, now living in Raleigh - planting flowers, playing golf, and rocking grandbabies, but still staying busy with interim pastorates here and there. He and I worked together in all sorts of meetings across the state, such as Stewardship Workshops, Pastors' Schools, and Missions Conferences. I learned a lot from his wit and wisdom, as he was my senior by 15 years.

We were together once, I remember, in a three-day Stewardship Clinic down in Clinton. The first morning for breakfast we discovered a quaint, rustic little family-type restaurant - cane bottomed chairs, red and white checkered oil cloth on square tables, oily, pine board floors, and all the other cluttered trappings of that type of restaurant - which has long since disappeared from the Clinton scene.

Featured was a hand-printed menu, in pencil, on a plain sheet of paper. After looking it over, I giggled to myself, and pointed out to Guy the source of my glee. He, too, shook with the titters. One item revealed that they offered two "PORCHED" eggs on toast.

An aproned, middle-aged woman approached and asked if we were ready to order. Noting our continued snickering,

she wanted to know what was so funny.

I said lightly, "Well, you've got your poached eggs out on the porch."

She looked, stammered a little, and said "Why that is misspelled, isn't it? Oh, well, my daughter made out that menu. I'll speak to her."

We returned the next morning, this time with a bright young girl standing by - got a fresh, clean menu from her, and after one look I was back to my giggling, with Guy grinning under his hand like a satisfied possum. The item now read two "POUCHED" eggs on toast.

The girl noted our mirth and wanted to know why, also.

"Well," I answered, holding the menu before her, "you've got the poached eggs off the porch and into a pouch now, I see."

She looked, stammered a little, and said, "Why that is misspelled, isn't it? Oh, well, mother made out that menu. I'll speak to her." I smothered my laughter as best I could.

Would you possibly believe that the third morning brought a blond, high school lad, a new menu, and this time two "PARCHED" eggs on toast? It did! And he ended my teasing by saying, "Oh, well, my dad made out that menu. I'll speak to him."

Guy and I got to plumb, out-right loud fits of laughter this go-round - no controlled, timid tittering. I thought I was gonna choke on a loose tonsil and throw an eyeball. I just laughed, period.

But in between mirthful breaths, I finally managed to impishly suggest, "We won't be back in the morning, but maybe for tomorrow's menu-making you folks oughtta give the cook a wild shot at them eggs!"

NOW, HEAR THIS

Dr. Cecil Ray, Executive Secretary of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, in the course of his average day will converse and confer with a whole passel of folks. One of his favorite responses to an individual or group is, "I hear what you're saying," meaning, "I listened carefully, weighed your words, and fully understand your point of view." I appreciate Dr. Ray's ability to be a good listener, but some folks have ears big as the floppy things attached to a Texas jack rabbit,

but really don't hear a thing - usually because in their minds they're totally locked into their own private little world.

At a motel restaurant in Mount Airy, I was having an early breakfast when a middle-aged couple entered and took a booth across from me near the window. Their casual dress indicated they were tourists "on the road." Both were on the plump side, exhibiting good doses of middle-aged spread at several vulnerable points.

After ordering from the menu, they settled back to await their breakfast. She opened a newspaper and buried her face in it, while he propped his chin on an elbow and stared out the window.

A moment later she said, without looking up, "Why, Jim, it says here that President Reagan is going to China to talk with those Communists - I think he ought to stay home and talk to Congress."

"Looks like it's gonna rain for us today," he said dourly, still staring out the window, "we won't make as many miles today if it does."

"According to this report, unemployment is at an all-time high," she added. This country is really getting into bad shape."

"I might have to get a new tire for the left rear if it does rain - it's mighty slick, and I don't want to take any chances."

"I see where they're still having all those student riots over in Japan," she injected strongly. "I think college students ought to study and behave, or go home - here or over there. It's the same."

"Wish I'd brought the map in," he remarked casually, fumbling in his back pocket for a handkerchief, "need to find a good route across all those mountains to Louisville."

"Well, well," she announced, "here's an article on that young woman the Prince of Wales is going to marry - and a picture. She's right pretty and lucky, too, I guess, though I wouldn't want to be married to any royalty - too much trouble and bother."

"I bet a plugged nickle that gas prices will be higher in the north than they are here in the south," he complained, blowing his nose and snorting like a sow.

"My, a bad tornado really tore up a town in Kansas yesterday - six people killed - that's too bad. Hope we don't run into anything like that," she said, flipping a

page, eyes glued to the paper.

He eased from the booth, stood up, replaced his handkerchief, and started moving away.

She looked up and asked, "Where're you going, Jim?"

"Think I'll go get us a paper - wanna see what's going on in the world this morning!"

THE BIG AND LITTLE OF IT

The other day I sat alone in a Hardee's restaurant in south Raleigh greedily chomping away on my fat hamburger, chewing on french fries, and gulping my big pepsi, trying to put some meat on my skinny frame. My booth was hard-by the condiment stand where the eaters came for their salt, pepper, sugar, horse radish, bar-be-cue sauce, ketchup and whatever else gooey stuff they put on their food.

All of a sudden here came a monstrous man who looked like a hump-back whale out of water - with a lot of prominently protruding frontal blubber, a head of frazzled black hair with a thick-matted beard to match, loose lower lip, hanging jowls, and arms like Texas fence posts. He reminded me of gigantic "Man Mountain Dean," famous wrestler years ago, and I thought surely the fellow must be one of those modern professional wrestlers who cavorts on television in all those comedic maneuvers, though he certainly wasn't any "Gorgeous George" type.

He waddled up to the condiment stand, having a tiny little white bag, from which he removed what must have been the thinnest, smallest hamburger Hardee's made. It was plumb lost in his massive hand. As he stood studying the condiments holding that little bitty thing, I got right tickled at the incongruous sight, and couldn't keep my big mouth shut. My loose tongue is always getting me into hot water here and there, especially with strangers.

"That sure is a mighty little burger for such a big man," I teased, looking up at him in evident amusement.

He towered over me, scowled through his beard, lit a hostile fire in his black eyes, and thundered down, "And you're a mighty little man to be talking to me that way!"

My loose tongue immediately stuck to the roof of my mouth - I didn't even breathe anymore, much less say anything else.

But I might have come out a little better and safer

with Rev. James Holt up in Pinch, West Virginia. He's pastor of the Highland Avenue Baptist Church in South Charleston.

I was visiting and inspecting some building activity at the Heritage Church near Pinch when Holt drove up to do some inspecting of his own, and to get some ideas for the building going on at his church these days.

He hopped out of his car, saying, "Why there's that ole North Carolina Red-Neck."

"Yea," I answered, "all of me. What in the world are you up to this morning, brother?"

"About 5 feet 10 inches," he replied smartly.

After taking his ironic smile in full stride, I promptly shot back, "Why, you dumpy little mustachioed, squat, bespectacled Baptist brother, you never saw 5 feet 6 inches in your whole fat life!"

I can talk back to Baptist preachers!

HOW YOU FEEL?

About the most common inquiry of one person to another is "How are you feeling?" (or just simply, "How you feel?" - to which one wag answered, "With my fingers - what do you use?"). But, regardless of what else is said or done, one always gets around to asking that concerned question - especially of a friend.

However, I recall one of my friendly preacher brothers walking up to me at a Baptist Convention, slapping me on the back, and exuding, "Hi there, Wilkie boy, how you feeling these days?"

"Well," I smugly assured him, smoothing down my frazzled hair, straightening my loud tie, and posing like a New York model, "I feel about like I look, I guess."

"Oh, Lordy, my poor brother," he shot back sympathetically, "I'm gonna put you on my prayer list immediately - you're a terminal case!"

I immediately lost interest in his feelings, and didn't even bother to ask about the health of his mangy old hound dog. And I absolutely refused to look at pictures of his grandchildren.

I have a standard policy of saying concerning my questionable looks, regardless of how my looks look, "This is the way the Good Lord created em. He doeth all things well, and I'm not in the habit of apologizing for His

manifold and marvelous handiworks!"

But in the restaurant in Lexington's Holiday Inn recently I overheard an involved answer to the question "how you feeling" cut down to a honed point, indeed - by a white-haired, spry, elderly gentlemen seated at a nearby table with several others of like vintage. Their early morning comradeship was close, light, and loud. They appeared to be a local group of retired men who had all day to coffee, chit, and chat. They were in no hurry.

Sipping on his coffee, one asked another, "How you feeling these days, Harmon?"

Harmon replied in a cackly voice, as he leaned forward on the table, "Well, Tom, when someone asked me that in the past, I'd always say, 'I'm feeling good' - which I usually am - but I've improved on that stereotyped reply."

"How's that?" pressed Tom, with the others listening intently - including me!

"Well, I have a cheery, chipper neighbor who always answers that question with 'Oh, I'm doing fine.' Somehow that got to sounding better to me than my 'doing good.' The other day I looked those words up in the dictionary, and sure enough, 'fine' was by definition a shade and step better than 'good.' A fellow who's fine is better off than one who's good."

"So now, if someone asks how I'm feeling, I just reply, 'I'm feeling right good and doing just fine' - and that just makes me feel better even if at the time I'm sick as a dog and haven't done anything since Methuselah died."

"And that's my answer to you this morning, Tom - even though, as you can plainly see, I have my arm in a sling, a big bandage across my forehead, and am carrying these dang crutches for a badly sprained ankle - because I got dizzy yesterday, fell head-first off the garage roof and about broke my fool neck!"

I broke a rib from laughing.

STICK IT OUT

Nobody, man, woman, or beast, loves a good cup of hot coffee more than I do. But I'm not one of these rugged individuals who can take things "straight and black," for I have to doctor it up with liberal doses of cream and

sugar - and I don't worry a bit about calories, weight, or sleep, but just drink and enjoy.

However, I recall one particular cup of most joyless coffee that didn't turn out so hot - literally. I came into this eastern North Carolina town and called a preacher friend to meet me at a certain restaurant for coffee and conference.

When we entered, the restaurant was crowded with noontime folks looking for burgers and fries, and we took the only available table, right in the middle of things. The table was completely bare.

Eventually, a jaunty little red-headed waitress spied us and hurried over with two place mats, asking, "What can I do for you?"

"Just coffee," I said, fiddling around in my briefcase.

She returned a little later with two cups, set them down, saying, "I'll bring your coffee in a moment", and hurried over to a table nearby with her pad and pencil. She occupied herself with other customers and orders for a few minutes while me and my friend began our coffeeless talking amid the hubbub all around us. She finally got to us with the coffee, poured it hastily, spilling some over and out of my cup. "I'll get you a napkin," she said, taking off like a jet.

My friend was one of them "straight" guys, and he lit into his with gusto, smacking his lips, and I just sat there, staring at mine, waiting for the redhead. A few minutes later, after being all over the whole place forty times, she came with napkins, and I said imploringly, "I'll have to have fixings for my coffee if you don't mind - cream and stuff, you know."

"Not a-tall," she came back not even slowing down as she went by.

Sure enough, a few busy minutes later, she dropped off some cream on her hurried rounds, and I cried after her, desperately, "I'll have to have sugar, too, if you can manage it."

"Be right back," she answered over her shoulder.

When the sugar finally arrived as she came close to our table again about ten minutes later, I added succinctly, "Now, I'll need a spoon with which to stir all this stuff I've gotten together here."

"Oh," she pouted, pausing to look, "be right back."

In about the next generation, after everybody else

had finished their meals and cleared out, she came with the spoon. My friend had long since finished his cup and was more than ready for the second.

Mine was so cold by this time that it would have scared off a polar bear. It had pure jelled in the cup, but I scraped it out and downed it, anyhow - ugh! She never got back to us again, and we just finished our conference and rose to go.

I plopped a 50¢ tip down on the table.

My friend looked aghast, "Why such a large tip, Wilkie, for such lousy service?"

"Well," I replied, sighing, "I greatly admire anyone who takes on a long-range project and sticks with it through thick and thin until it's completed!"

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

At a Hardee's Restaurant down in Rockingham, after I settled to sip on my coffee and to think about this and that, a couple of open-shirted, sandal-shod, long-haired teen-aged boys brought trays of food and plopped heavily down in the booth behind me.

Then came a large, neatly "dressed and tied", dark-skinned, raven-haired man to occupy a place about two booths down on the other side. Between gobbles and slurps, the boys got to talking about him right in my ear practically, but not loud enough for him to hear.

"What kind of Indian is that?" asked one.

"I don't know one injun from another," answered his friend through a mouthful of burger.

"I guess he must be a Lumbee, for that's what they have mostly in this part of the state," came back the other.

"There's Cherokee injuns around, too, ain't there?"

"Not around here," offered the evidently more educated of the two. "The Cherokees are up in the mountains."

"That ain't to say one of them couldn't get off down here, is it? I seen those Cherokees last summer up there and he sure looks like one of them to me. I bet he is."

"He doesn't look Cherokee to me - he's too dark for one of them," informed the educated one.

"All injuns are dark, you nut - that's what makes em injuns," insisted the fellow, working on his burger like a busy beaver.

"Well, I'd go over and ask him if I had the nerve and then we'd know. But I'm almost positive he's Lumbee."

"I ain't nervous," said the crude, brash one, rising, "I'll go ask im - and I bet I'm right."

He approached the man's booth, standing before him, still holding a half-eaten hamburger in one hand. The man paused with a raised cup of coffee, adjusted his tie with the free hand, smiled slightly, eyeing the boy with a curious look - and waited.

The boy shifted his burger from his right to left hand, and blurted out, "Me and my buddy over there wantta know what kind of injun ya are, buddy - what about it?"

Still smiling wryly, the man leaned and peered around the boy at his watching buddy, then looked back up at the boy, set down his cup, folded his hands, pursed his lips, and finally said smartly, "Well, young fellow, I'm an imported 12 cylinder Mercedes-Benz that gets 3 miles to the gallon. What did you think I was - a Ford Mustang?"

"Aw, you know what I mean, buddy - a real injun."

"Would you like it better if I told you that I was a Pontiac - now, there's a real, sure enough injun for you!"

The flustered boy muttered something under his breath, turned and crammed some more burger into his mouth on the way back to his laughing buddy - and I tried to stifle my own laughter as he passed me!

Well, the boys eventually got up and left out the back way without ever looking at the Indian again - still muttering. They sure did get my own curiosity up about that fellow, but I wasn't about to try to find out about him. It would have been fine with me if he were a pure blooded Chippewawpottamomac - or something worse.

LISTENING IN

It's sinful, I guess, to tune in on other folk's conversation. I was busy stuffing a Hardee's big roast beef into my mouth instead of my ears, so I couldn't help over-hearing the lively conversation in the next open booth. It was between two contrasting teen-age girls, but they proved to be commonly religious, as their talk was on a spiritual level.

"Helen," said one, 'it's so good to see you - where have you been lately? Haven't seen you around."

"Oh, I've been here, Suzy," answered the other,

gulping a coke. "It's good to see you, too."

"What have you done to your hair, Helen - or haven't done, since I saw you last?" asked Suzy, smearing mustard on a burger.

"Let it grow."

"Why?"

"Well, I joined this wonderful, spiritual church recently and our pastor said all women should have long hair - that it was scriptural. Also, that they should cover their heads, and not speak in church - just listen and obey."

"And where is your lipstick? Your lips look pale," pressed Suzy further, biting into her burger.

"Don't have any," drily answered Helen. "Our pastor said all that false man-made paint and rouge was sinful, and made a woman a direct descendant of Jezebel."

"I noticed your dress is real long, too - though, it's pretty," quickly added Suzy.

"Yes, our pastor said a decent girl wouldn't show a knee in public - that a dress should come to the ankles and be plain - that plainness was a virtue."

"Helen," asked Suzy, changing the subject, "did you happen to see that movie at the Bijou last week - about how our forefathers won the west? It was real good history and made me proud of my country."

"Oh, no," recanted Helen, shifting in her seat, "our pastor says Hollywood is rotten and immoral, and that all movies are of the devil."

"Well, you can see it on TV later."

"Not likely - don't have a TV. Our pastor said a TV set was the devil's tool and that the antenna were his horns."

"Helen, why don't you try my church sometime? I'd be glad to take you - know you'd enjoy it," pressed Suzy.

"Oh, no, our pastor said it'd be sinful to go to another church - and that no other pastor in town except him preaches the pure Gospel. Must you go so quickly, Suzy?"

"Yea, Helen," said Suzy, rising, "got to get ready for a big date tonight - get my hair fixed - try that new lipstick I've got - press my new dress, and be ready to go to a good movie with my date at seven o'clock. I have a pastor, too, Helen - but I also talk to Jesus every now and then!"

THEORETICALLY SPEAKING

I sat in a big restaurant recently, sipping coffee and "looking around." While casually observing various diners, I suddenly developed an instant theory (I'm full of theories - and other assorted stuff!) that how people chewed their food was a revealing index into their character, position, and habits.

My attention settled on a nice couple directly in front of me. The lady was about in her thirties - prim, dainty, blonde hair groomed impeccably, tastefully jeweled on hands and wrists. She sat straight, shoulders back, and lightly picked at her food.

She'd take a minuscule piece of meat, balance it on her fork, lift it to her mouth in a sweeping motion, lay the fork on her plate, fold her hands and start demurely chewing with closed mouth, straight up and down - rhythmically - occasionally dabbing the corner of her mouth with a napkin. She smiled pleasantly between bites, her eyes bright and alert.

"Now, here," I theorized smartly to myself, "is the the essence of a tidy, neatly arranged life - good housekeeper, tender, loving wife, genteel mother, sewing circle member, gracious tea host, and probably a Sunday School or Kindergarten teacher - fine with kids."

Across from her, the burly, black-haired man, with dark suit to match, was a surly, silent picture of dejection, and most deliberate in his eating. He'd stab a big glob of meat, ram it into his jaw, follow it with half a loaf of bread - then prop his chin in a hand with his elbow on the table, and slowly grind away, back and forth - sidewise - then up and down, going long seconds without chewing at all - just staring down at the floor with his whole face furrowed into long wrinkles.

"Now, here," I theorized further, "is an old coot who has a rancid slant on everything in general. He's probably in debt, worried about his job, upset over world conditions and is hesitant and uncertain in everything he attempts. He probably works in a funeral parlor, or in a zoo where the bengal tiger just escaped and he got the blame."

He leaned over and asked me the time, so I used that to start a conversation. It turned out his wife was a lady wrestler known professionally as "Tiger Lil," who, "though she's little, can tear your hair out by the roots,

twist your nose plumb off your face, and gouge your eyeballs in, if you don't watch her."

"And what do you do?" I inquired further.

"Oh, I'm a public speaker - clubs, banquets, and things like that," he replied. "I'm a stand-up comedian. I try to make people laugh."

Well, he sure made me laugh....at myself!

PASS THE SALT

The big restaurant was crowded and the only vacant table was next to mine at the window, so the middle-aged couple was forced to take it. They were dressed informally, with him decked in green pants and white sports shirt, while she wore a light pink pants suit, with matching hair ribbon.

But they were an incongruous sight, and I couldn't help but smile as they approached, weaving their way in and around tables. He was an expanded, roly-poly fellow well over six feet tall, while she was a little wisp of bone not over five feet and 90 pounds at the most. She looked like a flea clinging to a dog.

His hair line had receded to the point where he had more forehead than face. He was quite wide of beam, with an enormous, extended girth that hung in descending rolls of loose fat, the last of which completely overlapped and hid his belt buckle. A thick bull neck supported a jowl featuring three dangling, flapping chins.

He assisted the little woman to sit, then came around that table right next to me, loomed over his own chair like a hovering blimp, then went into a backward free-fall and crash landed in the thing with a dull thud that rattled spoons plumb out in the kitchen - the poor chair creaked, bent, but somehow managed survival intact, and I sighed with relief as I thought sure it was headed for the kindling pile.

I surmised that they had come out to eat because he had gobbled up everything in the house, and was on the prowl for more. One of his chins looked somewhat undernourished.

But he soon laboriously rose, saying, "Dear, I'm going to the washroom, and you go ahead and order if the waitress comes. You know what I want."

Well, the waitress came, and the tiny one lit into

ordering with unabandoned zest and gusto, and just about went through the whole menu - large steak, potatoes, gravy, rice, two kinds of beans, corn-on-the-cob, side bowl of soup, quart of milk, and pecan pie with two scoops of ice cream, among other things.

And she added demurely, "Also bring a small peach-cottage cheese salad - not too much lettuce - just one half peach and one scoop of cheese - also four plain crackers and a glass of water."

"Salad and water are all she gets to eat and drink at home," I thought to myself, "no wonder she's so tiny."

I was through eating by this time, but I hung onto my place just to watch that lardy fellow down all that fattening stuff. I was sure it'd be some show. He returned, and the chair survived another assault in pretty fair condition. He sat rubbing his massive hands in apparent anticipatory glee.

Well, when the waitress finally wheeled in all that food, the little woman reached, got a bowl, shoved it toward the man, then started taking the other dishes to herself, saying spritely, "Now, Bruce, you just eat your salad and drink your water while I have a go at it - I've gotta store up some energy if I'm gonna roller skate half the night with all those girl scouts!"

I kept my seat, anyhow - it was still a good show!

SERVED TO ORDER

Different words mean different things to different people - not that it makes much difference - except it makes for some comical or embarrassing situations sometimes.

Like the time on a cross-country train when a fellow ordered the usual for his traveling breakfast - toast, jelly, coffee, bacon, and scrambled eggs - but had second thoughts about the eggs just as the waiter was stepping through the door on the way to the kitchen with his order.

He called out to the waiter, who paused, "Since I'm on a diet, I reckon you better just eliminate those eggs."

The waiter scratched feverishly on his pad, and scratched his head even more feverishly as he went out between the rumbling cars, his eyebrows knit up into knots.

Five minutes later he re-entered, approached the

fellow's table, stood a moment, then said, "Sir, can't we just fry those eggs or something? The cook tells me that our liminator done fell out the window bout 10 miles back."

And in a similar vein is the case of where a cook was getting ready to make a cake and the good lady of the house asked, "For cake making, Jane, do you prefer granulated or pulverized sugar?"

Came back Jane promptly, "Maam, it's perfectly obnoxious to me as to whether it's graduated or paralyzed."

Also in kitchen matters, Hank Ketchum's "Dennis The Menace" must have been having stale hash for dinner when he said Grace and intoned, with one opened eye on his astounded mother across the table, "Lord, I thank Thee for this repaired food."

But, a certain fellow in court one day evidently knew his words all right. The stern judge severely reprimanded him for deserting his wife and going into hiding for weeks on end.

Answered the harassed one, "Good judge, sir, if you really knew that wife of mine, you wouldn't call me a deserter - sir, I'm a refugee!"

And a man was supposed to introduce Dr. Samuel Upham of the Drew Theological Seminary, who had come to preach in his church. He got a little flustered, apparently, for his introduction came out, "Friends, this is Dr. Drew of the Upper Zoological Cemetery."

Finally, a certain Englishman by name of Harrison had his troubles in trying to get off an overseas phone call to America. His cockney accent didn't transmit across the waters too plainly for the American operator and she was having great difficulty in getting his name straight, and kept asking him to repeat it - slowly.

After about forty tries, the frustrated Englishman practically yelled into the phone, "Maam, this is Mr. 'Arrison - 'Arrison - spelled with a haitch, a hay, two hars, a hi, a hess, a ho and a hen - 'Arrison - gaught it now, lassie?"

You could tell he was different the moment you noticed and observed him - tall, black, slick hair, impeccably attired with all matching colors, including flower in lapel - refined, polished and cultured-looking in every respect, though somewhat pretentious.

His fastidious actions at the next table to mine caught my eye immediately. First, before he sat, he took his handkerchief and carefully wiped off the chair - all over. Next, he held his water glass up to the light to examine it for spots, ran his finger over the silverware and wiped every piece with a napkin - and I began to think to myself, "Well, here is one all right - he'd probably jump to the ceiling if a germ spoke to him." He even examined the menu for guilty stains before he took to reading it.

While taking his order, the waitress dropped her pencil and it bounced on the table and into his up-turned plate, but she promptly grabbed it. He eyed her across his high-bridged nose in utter horror, lifted the plate, handed it to her and demanded another. She eyed him back but took the plate for replacement.

I finally figured it must have been her first day on a new job, for she made an all-around mess during the whole meal of pleasing that squeamish, precise fellow, and I felt sorry for her. She must have trotted an extra ten miles trying to end up with something acceptable to his exacting tastes - nothing seemed to work, and the harder she tried, the worse things got.

She had to fetch him a second glass of tea because he had observed the tip of her thumb in the first one. And I be-dog if she didn't have to change the table cloth because she got a splotch of greasy gravy on it from the bottom of a plate. He pushed back from the table, crossed his legs, and watched her closely. She kept her head down through the whole embarrassing maneuver and remained silent.

Next, she had to take his bread back for exchange because she used her hands to place it on the holder before him - and to cap it all off, she had to take his steak back because she inadvertantly sneezed just as she put it down before him. I never in my life saw such a demanding gourmet sophisticate. He really got into a boiling snit over that bumbling waitress, with his red

neck vessels poking out like tent cords as he fought to contain himself. As far as I could ascertain, she didn't do one solitary thing to make him happy and comfortable, despite all her effusive apologies and efforts. The whole affair was a total disaster. My sympathy for the poor waitress knew no bounds.

He finally called her over and said coldly, "I have a habit, sister, of observing my waitress and tipping in keeping with the quality of her service. I must say that you flunk completely on all points of quality, therefore, I'm not leaving you a tip - not a cent!"

She stood with hands on her hips, listening and smiling from the corners of her mouth. "That's all right, sir," she chirped brightly, pointing to a broad-smiling man across the way in back of him, "I'm way ahead of the game--your friend over there done gave me \$20 to louse you up real good!"

A LITTLE MORE SPICE

Beginning in 1929 with President Herbert Hoover waving from the rear platform of his official train stopped on the track by the Mills Home campus in Thomasville, I've seen, heard, met, and even "shook with" a lot of world famous people here and there. The shaking includes two Presidents, Harry Truman on stage at the Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City one spring, and President "Ike" at the ramp of his big plane in Augusta, Georgia, where I stood "nose to nose" with him in dawn's early light while a group of 5th graders sang him a farewell song on his last trip as President to his beloved Augusta. I was the guest in the teacher's home for the week, which is why I got to be a 5th grader for a while - I shook and talked with the President, but I didn't bless his sad departure by joining in the singing! I've seen other Presidents, but these are the only two I ever touched and talked with - probably couldn't get within a thousand yards of a President during these touchy days.

But my most memorable, closest, and extended encounter with a world figure took place in the dining room at the Holiday Inn up in Shelby. I had preached that night in a local church and was having a late, sleep-disturbing snack before retiring.

I heard a lot of almost raucous racket, giggling and

laughing, behind me, glanced through the lattice work separating the two areas, and espied my good friend, Dr. Eugene Poston, President of Gardner Webb College, standing surrounded by a group of pretty girls - who accounted for all the giggling and laughing.

I went back to give my greetings to Dr. Poston and to meet all those tittering girls, as well as tease him for being out that late with so many women on hand. I discovered a short, white-haired, goateed, cane-carrying gentlemen sitting in the midst of the whole noisy caboodle, who turned out to be no less person than Mr. Fried Chicken himself - Harland "Colonel" Sanders of "Kentucky Fried Chicken" fame! He was due to speak the next day at the college for a special occasion, and President Poston had arranged for his lively cheerleaders to be on hand at the airport in Charlotte to give him a royal welcome - and now he was royally entertaining them.

The girls were soon dispatched back to the college in their station wagon, and I had a most pleasant visit with just the Colonel and Dr. Poston, even accompanying them to the Colonel's room to say "goodnight" at the door.

In visiting my daughter and grandchildren in Richmond, Kentucky, I had stopped and eaten at his "original" restaurant in Corbin where it all started, and took great delight in relating the experience to him. He recounted those early, struggling days for us, and it was a thrill to hear of his drive and determination against all odds - at an advanced age when most folks have long since quit working.

Among other things, I said, "Colonel, being a Baptist Preacher, I really love your chicken and I assure you that I eat it."

He looked me up and down slowly, then retorted, "Hummmph, not much!"

"Well, I came back, "If you'll go a little heavier with all those secret sages and spices on your good chicken, maybe I'd fatten up a little."

Replied the colonel, fingering his famous goatee, "If you did, I'd fry you!"

HELP!

In two years of beating all over West Virginia looking for Baptists, one of my most delightful

discoveries was Staud's Restaurant up in Fairmont. To dine there is a satisfying and filling experience - especially on Sunday, when food, fellowship, music, and song are combined into a unique affair - you praise and worship God while chewing on Chicken legs - at least, I did!

The founders and owners, "Mom and Pop" Staud, are practicing members of the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Fairmont, and make no bones about fusing their open Christianity with business - and the whole community loves and respects them for it, and they patronize the restaurant in over-flowing numbers.

For instance, in the local paper under the heading of "How're You Going to Spend New Year's Eve?" the Stauds stuck their advertisement right in amongst those of the bars, cafes, night clubs, and dives, inviting the folks to "A Christian New Year's Eve Party" - and in a restaurant seating 250, they turned away more than 150. Everyone went home from the Staud's party sober and happy!

The Stauds started small over 55 years ago, operating a coffee and sandwich shop, in the same spot for 25 years before enlarging the operation to any degree. They moved into their present spacious, two-roomed building about 8 years ago, and have become a "family institution" for an entire area of the state.

And the restaurant is truly a family affair - six Staud children, four daughters and two sons, grew up with, and have served their time in, the restaurant, with three of the daughters, Patricia, Jeanne, and Mary, all married, still active in the business. The other daughter, Carol, also married, lives in North Carolina, while the sons Wesley and Joseph, engage in their own enterprises, but stay close and available. Nieces, nephews, and grandchildren have, and do, serve in the restaurant, also, but Mom and Pop are still right there on the job every day without fail, and outdo the whole bunch!

Four years ago, an organ and piano were installed in one of the large dining rooms, which can be shut off from the other if you don't want to participate, and the singing and praising began - Mom, Patricia and Jeanne do most of the playing and singing - duets, solos, trios, and instrumentals - all with a Christian slant and impact, featuring traditional, as well as modern, hymns. And the first thing you know, when things shift into high gear, you have a spontaneous sing-along, lively and joyous,

going full blast, with everyone joining in between bites of salad and ham. As I said, it makes for a unique experience. They also have Christian literature on hand for distribution and sale.

And the food itself is "out of this world," and is real "home-cooking" at its best. In this day of high prices and inflation, the cost is reasonable, and the proportions most Scriptural, indeed - "measured, pressed down, and running over."

It may sound a little unspiritual - but the only recourse I had recently after trying greedily to down in totality one of the Staud's generous, home-cooked, Sunday dinners was to desperately request the whole family to gather around the organ and imploringly sing, "Help Me, Lord Jesus!"

FITS TO A TEE

One of the first things you see coming into Parkersburg, West Virginia from the east on Highway 50 is the imposing Holiday Inn sitting astride a mountain top. In fact, a lot of things in West Virginia sit astride mountain tops, for those are the only places they have to put most stuff up there. That's one place that lives up to its nickname - "The Mountain State." They've gottem!

Anyway, one cold December Sunday afternoon, while on a speaking engagement in Parkersburg, I decided to put my little Citation into 4th gear and chug up that mountain to take a closer look at the Inn, and to see if their coffee passed inspection and taste. I judge all such establishments on the basis of coffee quality - if the coffee is no good, I don't care what else they might have - good or bad.

I first took in the view from the high hill, then made a grand tour of the tremendous lobby, testing various chairs, inspected some ornate meeting rooms, read some promotional literature, and ended up in the beautiful dining room for that cup of coffee, which turned out to be hot and delicious.

One whole side of the two-tiered dining room was a glass wall, affording a good view out into a unique, spacious atrium, replete and plush with pools, paths, tables, various exotic plants and flowers, and hanging baskets, plus a large stage on one side fronted by a

seating area filled with chairs. Folks could step right out of their rooms all around into a tropical paradise - mighty fancy and inviting.

I noticed a lot of activity going on in the atrium. A speaker's stand was set up on the stage, and folks were gathering from every direction - young and old - shedding their winter coats in the warm area, and taking seats, so I gathered that some kind of program was on tap. A hundred or more folks were on hand, with more coming all along, especially whole flocks of teen-agers who seemed most eager and excited.

When the young waitress approached to pour that second cup of coffee, I asked her, "What's going on out there?" Looks as if they're going to have preaching or something on this Sunday afternoon."

"Oh, they're getting ready to have a big fashion show of new bridal gowns for all seasons. All the big stores are represented - really some pretty gowns - and models. A lot of future brides and potentially paying mommas and poppas out there. I may even go out and look things over myself."

"Then I presume you're not married," I teased.

"No - but I'm on the prowl," she said lightly.

"Why, I bet you'd be mighty pretty decked out in one of those fine gowns - keep prowling and setting traps. You'll make it!"

"Oh, I'll wear one them gowns one of these days, don't worry."

"Well, I added, "I don't guess I'll bother with going out there - I'm long married and don't need any of that stuff anymore."

She backed off and looked me over real good, then moved in to pour my coffee, and said, "That's all right, I guess. They probably don't have a gown out there that would fit you, anyhow!"

Touche!

GREEN GIZZARDS

Experience is supposed to be the greatest teacher, and a young preacher just starting out, not having it, has to learn the hard, painful way - I did.

I eventually learned to keep my mouth shut, about certain things, anyway; and, also, to gratefully accept

what I could get without being so choosy.

My favorite food has always been chicken gizzards and I've greedily guzzled every gizzard I could get my craw around anywhere, anytime, for years on end--but decades ago I quit deliberately and publically scheming to get them, and just snap up whatever ones I happened to run into - after careful inspection.

In revival meetings, featured by "having the visiting preacher out for meals," I'd always preface my sermons with a vivid dissertation on the merits of succulent gizzards and urge "the next cook" on the list to have a juicy pot full on hand or face immediate excommunication from Heaven. That bold approach got results, and I dined on good gizzards like a feudal lord enjoying the cooking of his faithful, but cowed, vassals. Housewives chased, cooped, and cooked chickens for me all over North Carolina, and plumb up to Ohio, as well as into northern Georgia. It was a great life.

But things took a wry turn once when a lone, elderly widow set me down to her sumptuous looking table. She really had a mess of gizzards on hand - and, believe me, they were a mess!

She set a big bowl full of them right under my nose, saying with motherly demeanor, "I've been saving all of these just for you, Brother Wilkie." By the looks and smell of the things, I figured she'd been saving them for at least forty years - and had planned to preserve them for the Second Coming - you never in all your born days saw or smelled such slimy, green, spoiled globs of meat. It turned out she had stuffed sinuses and couldn't have smelled an active skunk, so she wasn't aware of what oderiferous stuff she had concocted.

But with her sitting right across from me, looking on most expectantly and solicitously, I had to fork one of the things and move it toward my face, trying to smile back at her. My nostrils flared in rebellion, my taste buds exploded, my tonsils backfired, my eyeballs turned over, and my gullet gulped in despair as I forced it into my mouth. I chewed, swallowed, gagged, and asked for water.

When she rose and went to the kitchen for the water, I grabbed a paper napkin, crammed a few gizzards in it and rammed them into my coat pocket. I'd get her to the kitchen again, grab a fresh napkin and stash away a few more. With about three kitchen trips and three good

stuffs, I pretty well managed to dispose of a goodly portion of the things - but my coat and pants ended smelling like sour mash at a deserted moonshine still.

I never thought that anything good as a chicken gizzard could possibly kill you - but those particular gizzards would have done in an armadillo.

When I finally staggered out of there, after having only ingested just one of them, I threw up, gave up, and shut up - to this day!

GRIT IN THE CRAW

According to tradition and general public opinion, "all preachers love chicken," and I at least qualify for some kind of preacher in that I surely love chicken in all stages, from egg to tough old hen or brawny rooster. I've eaten so much tender fried chicken that I could safely roost on a high tree limb any night, and have downed so much baked hen that I could grow pin feathers on my chin, plus consuming enough eggs in my life so that I must have enough cholesterol in my weak veins to stop up the Suez Canal.

But when it comes to chickens of any sort, I zoom in on the gizzard. This is my favorite morsel of all the foods for human consumption on God's green earth, and I know I've swallowed enough gizzards to start my own gravel pit - and I'm still on the prowl for them, everywhere, all the time.

However, I regretfully recall one good gizzard I didn't get. Over 30 years ago, in a revival at the West End Church in Williamston, I told the folks, from the pulpit, that I'd be coming for meals with the pastor, and if perchance, chicken was on the menu, that I certainly hoped they wouldn't let the family cat confiscate the gizzard - and I issued all sorts of dire warnings and threats if they permitted that awful tragedy to occur. I was after all the gizzards in town!

Well, one old man fixed me good when I went to his house for supper. He faced me squarely and said seriously, "Brother, I don't have but one old hen scratching around in the yard, and since she wouldn't die a natural death before you got here, I wasn't about to voluntarily slaughter the poor thing just to get a gizzard. However, there is one of her good, fertile eggs

- take it and grow your own gizzard!"

Shoot fire, I promptly took the big brown egg from his extended hand, carefully protected and preserved it, then brought it home with me at week's end. The next morning when I broke it into my greased and hot frying pan for some good eating, I discovered the old geezer wasn't joking - that thing was fertile, and it about hopped outta the pan before I could recover from the shock. So I got neither egg nor gizzard - and as far as I know that sneaky prankster's blooming old hen is still scratching in his yard for worms and filling her growing gizzard with fresh grit!

Speaking of eggs, I came upon two preacher friends and a deacon in a Greensboro restaurant recently while they were having their breakfast eggs. I joined them, and they got to discussing that age-old problem of which was first, the hen or the egg. One brother argued strongly for the hen, while the other protested in favor of the egg. They asked me what I thought, and I said, "I'm neutral, brothers, I eat both of them, and am just glad they're here."

The deacon injected at this point. "All you preachers are all wet - neither the hen nor the egg was first."

"What was then?" asked a preacher.

"The rooster!"

I'll buy that!

MEASURING UP

I don't need bursting rockets and flashing fireworks to get a big bang out of life - just a few little pops all along the way bring me real joy and leave an afterglow that brightens and heightens my life for days to come.

On the way back from Raleigh to Kinston, traveling #70, I stopped by Hardee's in Clayton for a hot cup of coffee to keep me awake until I could get to Kinston. As I stood at the counter to give my order, a rather portly sister, decked out from head to toe in fire engine red, came up beside me on the left, and leaned over the counter on her elbows as she studied the menu on the wall before her.

When I glanced at her, I noted a long white thread clinging to the sleeve on back of her right arm - a most

incongruous sight amidst all that sea of glaring red. I tried to look away, but my eyeballs froze on that thread and I couldn't take my stare off of it. She continued to study the menu, oblivious to me or the thread.

Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer, so I gently nudged her elbow with my hand to get her attention. She straightened, turned, and looked at me with a puzzled expression.

"Pardon me, good lady," I said quickly, "but if you don't mind, I'm going to pick you, and know you'll appreciate it, for you have a long white thread sticking on that pretty red sleeve."

"Oh," she said, "which one?"

"There," I replied, reaching and softly plucking off the thread.

"Well, thank you sir," she exuded, "I don't meet many strange men who are so bold and considerate."

"I'm strange, all right," I laughed, "as you can fully gather." I returned to my coffee-getting, feeling pretty smug and satisfied.

When I turned my back to leave with the coffee, she cried after me, "Mister!" I paused and turned as she added, "You need picking worse than I do."

"Oh, what? Where?" I asked

"There's a big slimy worm crawling on the back of your collar."

"Oh my goodness," I said, "pick me! pick me!"

"Not on your life," she laughed.

"I'll give you your thread back if you will," I pled.

"Keep the thread and use it to lasso the thing," she giggled.

I hurried to my table and set down the hot coffee just as the critter crawled off the collar onto my bare neck. I reached back and gently removed the cold culprit. It turned out to be one of these little funny, so-called "Measuring worms" - those that scoonch all up into a hump then straighten out, then start over again - and again. I put him down on the floor and let him haunch away like forty.

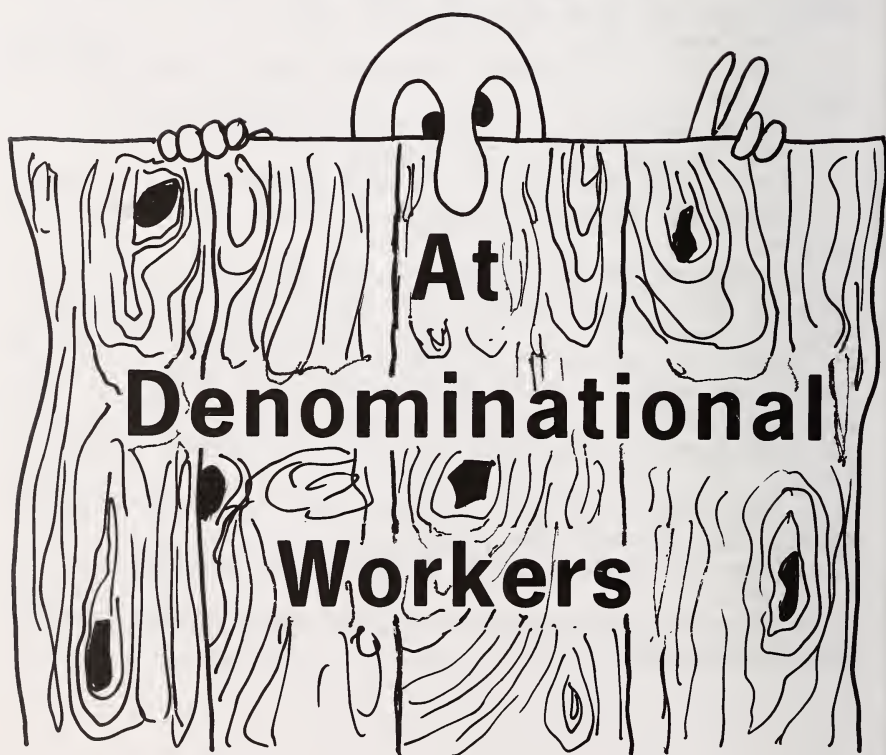
The woman stopped by on the way to her booth and asked, "Did you pick the worm?"

"Yea, and I have him on a special assignment."

"What?"

"He's to report back to me the total square feet in this dining area!"

JUST LOOKIN' AROUND



Playing a number of key roles on the N.C. Baptist State Convention stage for the past quarter of a century has been precise, calm, steady, astute, careful, plodding R. Tom Greene - preacher, writer, statistician, financial wizard, business man, organizer - and wry humorist.

He serves at present as an associate in the Business Management office, but also has served Baptists as an Associational Missionary, Director of Retirement Planning, Assistant in, then Director of, the Stewardship division, as well as a pastor in several churches before all that Convention service began in the late fifties.

I've labored with, and under, Tom through all the years of my own Convention service, and he has been one of my main sources of joy and satisfaction in the work. He and I, along with others in the Stewardship Division at the time, spent many a mile and hour on the roads over the state on the way to stewardship clinics, seminars, workshops, and various meetings in promoting missions and the Cooperative Program. He has uttered more words, preached more sermons, produced more materials, handed out more tracts, written more letters, and raised more prayers for the Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists than any man who ever lived between the two oceans - and in the process has drunk enough coffee to fill both of them over!

He could very well bear the double title of "Mr. Coffee and Cooperative Program," for he loves both with unstinting passion - keeping his stomach filled with one and his heart with the other. He'll meet you anywhere, anytime, day or night, for a cup of coffee and a discussion of the Cooperative Program. He also drinks iced tea spiced with liberal doses of milk, and ends up with an odd concoction that looks like it was scooped out of the kitchen sink. But he loves it, and unsuccessfully has tried to get me hooked on it!

Tom is the calm one under all conditions, and exhibits an inner imperturbation that is remarkable, indeed. You couldn't get him to raise his voice or hasten his deliberate pace if you beat him on the head with a ball bat while pouring red ants down his collar. If he were a wave in the ocean with a hurricane whipping up rolling 40 foot crests with 200 miles an hour winds, the other heaving waves would just have to pass over him - he'd stay flat and even, and wouldn't budge until he'd

"thought things over and through."

Typical of Tom's serene, but bright, spirit is his remark to a brother one time at an Associational Meeting where he was to be the closing inspirational speaker. Things dragged on and on during the meeting, hit some snags in business matters, and was running way behind schedule. Tom finally got up and went outside to stretch a bit and came upon another weary leg-stretching brother on the church steps. The man asked Tom, "Brother, are you going to stay with this to the bitter end?" Replied Tom in his slow, deliberate drawl, "Friend, I AM the bitter end!"

Well, Tom isn't at the end yet - and has enough dispositional sweetness to fill a bee hive!

MRS. DIXIE MYLUM - TOP NOTCH

Out around Berea and Richmond, Kentucky, one of those well and kicking "Living Legends" is the ebullient Mrs. Dixie Mylum - a spiritual windmill and educational dynamo who constantly generates spreading sparks in church, community, and school life that light up the whole country side. Her feats and following are legion.

A widow now, she was a Baptist preacher's wife in the college town of Berea for over 20 years, and for the past several has taught social science to hundreds of admiring students at Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond. One of those admiring students is my oldest daughter, Lou, whose husband is pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Richmond, and she unequivocally avows that the sun rises, sets, and shines in "Mrs. Dixie" - and that the moon couldn't make it up without her help, either. Lou's gracious attitude was made more pliable when Mrs. Mylum recently gave her an "A" on the course!

Mrs. Mylum is sought, loved, respected, and greatly used by Kentucky Baptists, and others, especially in Woman's Missionary Union Work, being a real expert in that field. She is a member of "The Star Team" - a select group of talented women from over the whole nation chosen and charged to challenge and lead Baptist churches in their respective states to start new organizations in women's work. Mrs. Mylum could take the toe of a flea and start a dog, so there will be a lot of new W.M.U. units over Kentucky in due time, I'm sure.

One time Mrs. Dixie was slated to teach a five-night study course to a big group of mostly furred, floosie, upper-crust, fashion-conscious "big down-town" church women. She is simple, plain, unpretentious, and down-to-earth, as well as straight-forward, and she was about to get out of her earthly element in this particular situation.

She knew good and well that those ladies would be studying and examining her carefully and critically every night, looking for faults in dress and appearance.

She actually didn't give a hoot about the inconsequential matter, but in making concession to the inevitable, she very judiciously planned her outfit each night from her scant wardrobe and expertly put together a fetching get-up for each session. She made doubly certain everything was new and fresh each time, no repeats on any item of clothing or simple accessories. She even wore difference glasses a time or two.

Well, she apparently got by in fine fettle until the last night, with no undue comment or criticism, and was congratulating herself on doing so well in the world of high fashion, plus the fact that she was enjoying the study course.

But that night, one multi-painted, bejeweled old Cookie leaned over and said snootily to her neighbor, "That Mrs. Mylum wears the same old drab hairdo all the time, doesn't she?"

Sometimes, you can't win for losing, no matter what. But I doubt if Mrs. Mylum would undo and take down her familiar, grandmotherly "top notch" for the Prince of Wales or the Queen of Sheba - much less for some fancy down-town study course!

REV. COY PRIVETTE - FINE AND DANDY

Rev. Coy Privette, while a baseballing student at Wake Forest College in the early fifties, served as interim pastor at the Troutman Baptist Church for a spell. I forget how he heard or learned of me, but he wrote and invited me to assist him in a week's revival - and our Baptist paths have criss-crossed ever since in warm, cordial, and friendly encounters. I have followed his rather checkered career with interest and deep admiration.

He has served North Carolina Baptists well in several

places of influence and leadership through the years. From a most successful pastorate in Kannapolis, he took a year out to run well, but unsuccessfully, for the Governor's mansion in Raleigh.

He is now serving as Director of the Christian Action League, which is supported by 16 religious denominations, in a determined and relentless battle against liquor, gambling, pornography, child abuse, and all other moral blots on our society and culture. Coy stays in the forefront of the battle on every level and, to say the least, is not the most popular person with certain people and groups over the state. He doesn't claim to be in a popularity contest!

Coy maintains a wonderful sense of humor, despite the sordid and distasteful matters with which he lives and deals every day. For instance, speaking recently to the Sandy Creek Baptist Association in the Oakley Church at Siler City, where I had preceded him on the program, he told of an incident that illustrates that things aren't always what they seem on the surface.

This old farmer was clomping placidly along down a mountain road in his wagon being pulled laboriously by his two faithful, plodding mules, "Blue" and "Jack."

All of the sudden a big dump truck came barreling over the hill, slammed into the wagon and sent things flying in every direction. The mules ended up lying kicking and wounded in the ditch, with the broken farmer sprawled amidst the ruins of his shattered wagon.

Later, he sued the truck company for personal and property damages, and appeared in court in enough bandages and casts to look like a mummy. The defense lawyer jumped right on him, asking, "How is it, sir, you come in here so all hurt up when it's a well documented fact that you plainly indicated at the wreck scene that you were fine - not hurt at all - several people heard you so state. Explain that, if you can."

"It's simple, sir," replied the farmer, shifting in his seat, "when folks arrived at the scene, one of the first ones was the county sheriff. He went over and looked at old Blue in the ditch, and asked what the matter was. Someone said Blue had a broken back, so that sheriff whiffed out his 38 magnum and promptly shot Blue right in the head to put him out of his misery.

"He next turned to Jack and asked what was his trouble, and when it turned out that poor Jack had both

hind legs broken - ka-pow - another shot in the head.

"And, sir, when that rascal came over and asked me how I was, I couldn't move a bone or muscle, but I shore told him quick as a flash that I was fine and fit as the cow that jumped over the moon!"

SARAH HOBBS & NANCY CURTIS - ONE THAT GOT AWAY

The person who wrote "I shot an arrow into the air, and it fell I know not where," put his wise finger on one of life's most frustrating experiences - to start, or launch, something and then never be in position to really know "how things turned out." We like to see and know definite results of all our actions, but this isn't always possible - as in the following case.

Sara Ann Hobbs and Nancy Curtis are two single (Sara says "unclaimed") women who occupy important and strategic positions in North Carolina Baptist life, working out of Raleigh. Sara Ann is the director of the multi-faceted Missions Division of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, while Nancy heads up the equally vital Women's Missionary Union work on a state-wide level.

To beat the rising living costs of these days, Sara and Nancy recently pooled their resources and built a house, with acreage and a small lake, "way down in the woods," and have been busy fixing, painting, repairing, and even "farming!" Those who have looked in on the cooperative venture say it's really something to behold, indeed.

In addition to encountering and overcoming the usual number of insects, spiders, frogs, lizards, and such, the intrepid girls have also had to deal with snakes of various sorts and colors.

One warm afternoon Nancy was mowing weeds atop the small dam on the lake when she suddenly came upon an ugly, long, coiled copperhead that had taken out a lease on a patch of good weeds - and showed no disposition whatsoever to vacate his illegal holdings.

Cutting the mower, and keeping her wide eyes on the tongue-flicking varmit, Nancy yelled for Sara to fetch the gun pronto. Sara came running with the 410, thrust it into Nancy's grasping hands, and backed off to a safe distance, putting fingers into her ears.

Nancy shouldered the gun in best western fashion,

inched nearer the defiant copperhead, aimed down at it, and let go with both barrels - dirt, dust, and weeds flew up in resounding, scattered array as the sound of the mighty blast rolled out across the lake.

As things quietened and settled down, Nancy and Sara crept close, cautiously surveying the results of the shot and powder maneuver, and there in the bottom of the big hole created by the blast - wriggling and writhing wildly like a sick worm having convulsions - was the very tip end of the copperhead's tail! The rest of him was long-gone into the thick weeds and not to be seen.

They kept a sharp eye out for that squirming fellow for a solid month, and never did see him again. They even searched a wide area around the lake for sight of him, but with no luck, so finally gave up. But, Nancy strongly avows in no uncertain terms that the reason they haven't seen him is that he crawled off and died, for "I really got a lot more of him than the scant evidence showed."

However, Sara Ann, keeping a wary eye on the touchy Nancy, declares facetiously, "The real reason we haven't seen that snake again is that he's too ashamed to be seen in public without his tail!"

SARA HOBBS & NANCY CURTIS - IT'S IN THE BUCKET

In a previous column I described the encounter with a copperhead snake that Sara Ann Hobbs and Nancy Curtis had out at their new house "in the wilderness," wherein Nancy took dead aim at close range with a 410, and succeeded in blowing off the poor thing's wriggling tail, with the rest of him scrambling off into the weeds to freedom.

Well, Sara Ann, Director of the State Missions Division for North Carolina Baptists, and Nancy, State W.M.U. Director, didn't end their affair with snakes by sending the copperhead on his merry way, for there have been others to take his disappearing place.

At least one of them, wherever he is at this moment, probably never will forget the experience of meeting these two intrepid Baptist girls, and will be telling his grandbabies of the "moving experience" as long as he can wriggle tail and tongue, for most moving it was, indeed - for the snake!

Nancy was busy tending to a big, leafy, potted house plant they had brought in from the outside for the winter

- picking off dead leaves, loosening the soil, straightening branches, and such stuff, when she jumped back with a loud cry, "Sara, there's a snake down in there!" Sara came running over to look.

Well, this time it turned out to be a four-foot black snake, who apparently had chosen to winter down amongst the thick leaves of Nancy's pretty plant. The girls immediately set about to change those ill-conceived plans.

They gingerly carried the pot outside and "poured out" the critter onto the ground. Sara grabbed a nearby broom and used it to keep the frantic varmit under reasonable control, preventing his escape by sweeping him back every time he tried to take off. They decided, since he was harmless, not to dispatch him with the deadly 410, but simply to move him to other environs.

Nancy got a big plastic bucket, laid it on its side, grabbed a stick, and between them they eventually succeeded in maneuvering the confused snake into the bucket, quickly uprighting it.

Then, fearless Nancy grabbed up the bucket and took off toward the distant woods, holding it far out in front of her, making for awkward running. Sara, leaning on her broom, just stood watching the weaving, fast retreating Nancy and her snake-filled bucket.

About every ten swaying steps, the desperate snake would come slithering up the sides of the bucket, getting about half way out, but Nancy would stop, start shaking the bucket around, back and forth, and send him plopping back to the bottom, and take off in unsteady course again. This went on indefinitely in perfect rhythm. She'd run ten steps, stop - shake, rattle, and roll; run ten steps, stop - shake rattle, and roll - over and over. Sara was about to split open laughing at the whole reeling, wobbly maneuver. Nancy pressed on.

By the time Nancy got to where she finally dumped the thing onto the ground for his freedom, he was so dang "shook up" and deeply dazed he couldn't move a lick - and the thin Nancy had shook over two pounds off her trembling carcass. Sara lost three from laughing so long and loud -- and I'll lose 40 when they get through beating on me for writing this!

It has been said that "there is a wrong way and a right way to do everything," and I suppose it's largely true, though there may be a few exceptions to this rule. On the whole, true success comes when we do the right thing in the right way. Even though one's objective may be good and right, the employment of wrong methods often produces disastrous results.

Dr. G. Earl Guinn, one of my former seminary professors and long-time president of Louisiana College at Alexander, Louisiana, tells of an incident which illustrates this principle to a fine nuance. Dr. Guinn cuts everything to a fine point!

Seems these two great pals had planned a hunting trip involving spending the night in a rude, rustic cabin in the woods in order to get an early morning start after their elusive game.

They stood in extreme physical contrast - one being a bloated elephantine hulk of soft beef and bone hung on a wide, massive, six-foot-plus frame; while the other, like me, was a skinny, springy little kangaroo who didn't have enough beef and bone to flavor a decent bowl of thin soup.

They made their way out to the cabin at dusk, stacked their gear, ate sandwiches for supper, stored the rest of their grub, and prepared for early retirement. It was a hot, muggy night, so they moved the one large, iron-posted bed over under the open, screenless window in order to catch what little air was stirring.

The thin one suggested the he be allowed to sleep next to the window, saying, "If you sleep next to the window, you'll block all the air off of me and I'll smother, but the air can blow right over me to you, and we'll both be cool that way."

The big one agreed, turned over on his side, and was soon sawing logs in all gears. The little one lay on his back beside him, fighting to get to sleep over the noise, and finally succeeded in drifting off into restless slumber.

About this time, an old wild, hungry, scraggly tom cat jumped up to the window sill from the outside, and sat silently sniffing, attracted by the faint odor of the food beyond.

Finally, he gingerly stepped out onto the skinny

one's stomach on the way to a tasty meal. The lean rail came out of his stupor with a start, made a wild grab at the leaping tom cat, and got him by the hairy tail as the screeching beast came down across the sleeping fat one, digging in for dear life with all four sharp-clawed paws.

The stack of bones stood up on the bed, and with both hands now on the tail, gave a mighty yank and sent the screaming cat flying out the window - along with shreds of torn pajamas and tattered bits of bloody flesh from the generous frame of the fat one.

The gargantuan hulk turned over with a yelp, sat up, and writhing in bloody, itching pain, cried, "What the devil was that?"

"I ain't sure," replied thin bones, stooping beside him, "but I think it was an ole tom cat."

Wiping blood and groaning in pain, the giant whomped the dwarf on the noggin, and exclaimed, "A tom cat? Don't never, ever PULL a tom cat, ya big idjet - POOSH 'im!"

REVEREND GEORGE SHORE - SPINNING SUDS

Big and affable Reverend George Shore of Raleigh, as part of his job with North Carolina Baptists, works with 65 or so "Directors of Associational Missions" over the state. George helps them plan and promote certain portions of their labors among the churches which relate most directly to the overall work of the N.C. Baptist State Convention.

This group, which includes both men and women, represents one of the busiest hives in Baptist circles - going day and night, always on call to pastors and churches, ever on the move - preaching, counseling, teaching, promoting, writing, and visiting. In a paradoxical manner, George continually urges them to work hard and faithfully, but at the same time warns them "to slow down" for their own good.

In speaking to a group of them at Camp Caraway near Asheboro he tried to warn them of the dangers of "perpetual motion," saying, despite all the pressures and demands of their tasks, they must learn to take it easy occasionally, get their feet off the pedal for a spell, and relax during periods of refreshment and restoration.

He told them of a little breathless, freckled-faced tyke who rushed into a store clutching money in both hands

and asked for a giant box of "Duz" soap flakes.

"What you want with all that soap, little fellow?" jokingly asked the portly proprietor. "You look clean as a whistle."

"It's for my dog, mister, he got in a mess and is the dirtiest thing you ever saw. Mama won't let him around in that shape, so I just gotta clean him good," answered the tyke, holding out his money.

"But you hardly need a box of strong Duz for your dog, son," replied the man laughing out loud, "that's a laundry detergent for clothes, not dogs."

"But that pretty woman on TV said Duz would get any kind of dirt out of anything, and my dog is fulla dirt, man, so give me a big box of Duz!" insisted the restless boy.

"But your dog won't like it, sonny, and, besides, I don't think that would even be good for your dog - might even do harm, blind him or something," argued the owner, "we have other milder products that will suit the occasion better. Try one of them."

"I'm after dirt - the lady said that Duz gets dirt - so give me the Duz," pressed the boy, still holding out the money.

He grabbed the box, rammed it under his arm, paid the man, and ran from the store, leaving the storeman scratching his head, but still smiling.

A couple of days later he happened to see the lad on the street.

"How's that duddy dog, laddie?" inquired the man, as he patted him gently on the head.

"Oh, he's dead now, mister," answered the boy, looking up at him with doleful eyes.

"Well, I tried to tell you that all that Duz might do him harm, didn't I?"

"Oh, it wasn't the Duz, mister. He got along just fine with the washing--it was that ole fast spin cycle that done 'im in!"

REVEREND ROY HOLDER - VIEW FROM THE WINDOW

Big Roy Holder (and I do mean big!) of Brevard, way up in the southern mountains near the South Carolina line, is a layman, but has done more preaching and teaching in his day than most preachers - first as an Education-Music

Director in churches in several cities, such as Concord, Thomasville, and Asheville - and for the last nine years as the Director of Missions for the mountainous Transylvania Baptist Association, where he has made a name for himself as a dynamic, innovative, and motivating leader. He gets things done!

In fact, his reputation has extended all the way up to West Virginia, and recently, in their annual retreat at the beautiful Hawk's Nest State Park overlooking the awesome New River Gorge, the six West Virginia Directors of Missions had Roy up to share his knowledge and expertise with them. My wife and I sat in on the session so we could learn something, too.

Well, in addition to learning that Roy really knew all the ins and outs of complicated associational work, I found out that he's a pretty mean story-teller, too. I forget what he was trying to illustrate by it, if anything, but he threw in the following tale somewhere along the line.

Seems as if three robust, healthy young men, who should have been in the very prime of their lives, arrived simultaneously at the proverbial Pearly Gates above and requested entrance from the keeper of the gate - St. Peter, naturally.

St. Peter eyed them in rather surprised startled fashion, and inquired, "How is it that three such young men are here at the gate? You should be working, playing, and enjoying life below."

"Well, answered the first young fellow, bowing his head in shame, "I guess it's really my own fault that I'm here. You see, I was in love with this beautiful girl, but I was insanely jealous, and didn't want her even looking at another man. I got suspicious that she was cheating on me and seeing another guy, so I stormed her fourth floor apartment in an effort to catch her. When I broke in, she was in the kitchen - alone - I couldn't find anyone else there, but I noticed an open window with the curtains flapping in the wind, looked out, and saw a man about to cross the street below, and I was sure he had been in the apartment and had scurried down the fire escape. In a blinding rage, using superhuman strength, I grabbed the refrigerator, hoisted it through the window and threw it over the fire escape down toward the man - well, all that rage and extra exertion gave me a heart attack, so here I am."

The second fellow said, "St. Peter, I don't know just why I'm here - really - I was just about to cross the street to go to a restaurant for dinner when a big refrigerator came tumbling down on my head from out of nowhere."

Added the third, "And Good Sir, I have no idea of why I'm here, either. I was just sitting calmly in this refrigerator, minding my own business, when some big jerk threw the thing out the window from four stories up!"

DR. M.A. HUGGINS - FROM NOTHING TO ZERO

From the early thirties to the late fifties, for a period of 27 years, the Executive Secretary and Treasurer of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention was gaunt, gangly, white-haired, pipe-smoking, erudite, former college professor Dr. M.A. Huggins. Dr. Huggins, a layman, occupied this alpine position longer than any man, before or since, and the shadow of his long and wide ministry still extends to every nook and corner of the state - and beyond. He was known and recognized everywhere as "Mr. Baptist," and exemplified that good title in both word and truth. His feats and accomplishments are beyond description.

There was one illustrative incident that he loved to tell about at annual associational meetings as he traveled the state trying to stir and challenge Baptist to greater heights and efforts. He believed in starting where you were, then moving forward. He was never satisfied with the "Status Quo," no matter what level that status was on. He ever pressed on to higher ground and took North Carolina Baptists with him!

However, he showed some "delightful frustration" with an annual report, or "church letter," he received from a certain church one year. He would get these yearly statistical letters in his office from all the churches over the state and pore over them for hours and hours, trying to spot trends of weaknesses and strengths in the work. He was a master statistician.

He carried this particular letter with him one fall every where he went, and shared it with the people as a teaching example. It was a statistical gem, with the tables reading like a perfect no-hitter for a baseball pitcher. In part, it went as follows: Baptisms - 0;

Additions - 0; Losses - 0; Study Courses - 0; New Organizations - 0; New Buildings - 0; New Staff Added - 0; Gifts to the Poor - 0; Gifts to Local Missions - 0; Gifts to State Missions - 0; Gifts to Foreign Missions - 0.

And so it continued all the way through - zilch in every area.

Scribbled across the bottom of the letter in the pastor's own handwriting, was this brief note, "Dear Dr. Huggins, please pray with me that during the coming new year, to the glory of God, our little church will hold its own!"

Added Dr. Huggins, with a wry grin, "Brethren, I prayed for him - not with him!"

DR. B. W. SPILMAN - SNAKY SHACK

Sitting on my front porch at the Kennedy Home out from Kinston, where I was pastor in the late forties, the scholarly and jolly Dr. B. W. Spilman and I spent one pleasant Sunday afternoon swapping snake stories.

I told him about the only genuine nightmare I had ever had, which occurred when I was 12, and still gives me the shimmies and creeps when I recall it - for in my dream I fell off a little bridge into a black stream swarming with wriggling snakes, and those slimy things were crawling all over me. I wildly thrashed, kicked, yelled, bellowed, and tore my bed to shreds before waking. It was awful.

"Son," said Dr. Spilman, smiling and shifting positions, "I can top that with reality - not just a dream - for this actually happened."

Then Dr. Spilman, the main force behind the founding of gigantic Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly, which sits astride the Continental Divide between Old Fort and Black Mountain, proceeded to relate a spine-tingling affair that took place during the early days of construction on the twisting road from Old Fort up to Black Mountain, sometime in the twenties, I think - whenever.

They started work from both ends of the project - one crew up at Black Mountain and one down at Old Fort. The foreman, to expedite things in working with both crews, had his men go about half-way up the rugged mountains and construct a crude, one-room shack. They finished it in one day, and he brought up a bed, a table, a stove,

groceries, plus his wife, and moved in for the summer.

During that first night, soon after they had retired, his wife shook him gently, and said nervously, "Honey, there's something on my foot."

He had a shot gun and a powerful, battery-operated lamp handy by the bed, so he proceeded to fumble for the lamp and finally switched it on. When he did, his wife let out a scream and dived under the cover - and he froze stiff as a steel pipe.

There were snakes by the dozens all over that room - the foot of the bed, all over the floor, on the stove, under the table, slithering along the exposed rafters, and more coming in through every crack and opening - black snakes and rattlers of every size. When the light came on and his wife screamed, the black snakes began to scatter, and the rattlers went into menacing, eerily-singing coils, holding their ground, which is their nature.

Well, space won't permit all the gory details, but somehow or other, that gutty foreman managed to slip out of bed, get hold of his gun, empty the shell, and using it for a club, methodically started in on the snakes, employing the lamp to blind each snake as he approached. Most of the cowardly black snakes ran, but before he got through he had clubbed 3 black snakes and over 30 rattle snakes. They had built his summer abode smack dab on top of a big snake den, and the varmits had come swarming out at night to investigate just what was going on atop their good abode.

Needless to say, that exhausted foreman didn't take out any long-term leases on that shack!

DR. FORREST C. FEEZOR - ALL SHOOK UP

Up in New Lebanon, New York, there is a pacifist religious settlement of people popularly known as "The Shakers," founded by Ann Lee in 1770. I don't know all the facts and figures of their background, but I'd be bound to surmise that in some way they are kin to Baptists, for Baptists are the biggest, most prolific "shakers" in the whole wide world - handshakers, that is! The fellow who wrote the popular song "I'm All Shook Up" must have just come from attending a Baptist convention, where more shaking goes on than in an apple orchard at harvest time. Baptists believe in "shaking."

And I'm really a "shook up" Baptist, for I've been shaking all over creation for two generations. On the little finger of my right hand I have what I affectionally call my "Baptist knuckle" - one that is distorted and swollen into twice its normal size from shaking more hands than a presidential candidate on a cross-country campaign jaunt. The bloated knuckle comes from thousands of big Baptists grabbing my little bitty paw and grinding it up in their massive hands like corn in a grist mill - but I keep running it through, for I enjoy it, and strangely enough, the knuckle isn't the least bit sore - yet! My worse pains in handshaking come from the sharp rings on women's fingers - not from strong men - and I have to get out the bandaids quite often.

However, the best known handpump among Southern Baptists nationwide belongs to North Carolina native, Dr. Forrest C. Feezor, now retired and living in Black Mountain, but who closed out his active ministry down in Texas, first as pastor of the Broadway Church in Fort Worth, then with the First Church, Waco, and finally as Executive Secretary of the Texas General Baptist Convention. Now, at over 90 years of age, he's still shaking everything in sight with as much vigor and power as ever. If you've got nerve enough to set yourself and await one of his tremendous handshakes, then you're in for one of life's most unforgettable experiences - one that will stay with you.

Dr. Feezor approaches you with a wide, friendly smile on his face, pauses, winds up like Bob Feller on the mound getting ready to let fly his 100-mile-an-hour fast ball, then zooms in with his huge hand in a wide-swinging arc that slaps into your outstretched palm like a clap of stormy thunder, with the heavy impact sending pulsating repercussions down your arm into your body that spins your eyeballs, flattens your skull, muddles your brain, bends your spine, and drives your heels six inches into solid ground, then pumps you up and down like he intends to strike oil somewhere in your lower regions....if you manage to survive the initial assault, then you're in for some mighty good talk and fellowship, for he talks as good as he shakes.

Dr. Feezor ordained me to the Gospel ministry at the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Raleigh over 40 years ago, then promptly hauled off with one of his thundering, congratulatory handshakes and about aborted my poor

ministry before it could get started. At least, he got me off to a good beginning by jarring my tight tongue loose for future preaching - it has been flapping ever since!

DR. FORREST C. FEEZOR - HAVE A SEAT

Scripture, quoting Jesus, admonishes us, "that a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of things he possesseth." There was a time when, if my life had consisted of the abundance of possessed things, I'd have been plumb dead!

One of those times was when I went to the Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, 1948 - 1950. the first year there, we (wife and 2 year old son) rented a small, furnished two-room apartment; but to have a little more space, the second year we moved into an unfurnished three-room affair - and for all practical purposes, it stayed largely unfurnished, especially in the small living room, where we managed one scraggly chair, some home-made book shelves, and two flower pots - Texas air took up the rest of the available space.

Dr. Forest C. Feezor, thunderous preacher and bone-rattling hand shaker, who ordained me to the ministry at the Tabernacle Church in Raleigh in 1941, had preceded us to Texas when he left Raleigh to become pastor of Broadway Church in Fort Worth, then to the great First Church, Waco, where he was when we arrived in '48. He later became the Executive Secretary of the General Convention of Texas Baptists. At, or close to, 90 he's still active in preaching and teaching over North Carolina, living in Black Mountain.

Dr. Freezor came over from Waco one morning to speak in chapel at the Seminary. After the service, Nancy and I went up to the rostrum to greet him, where he was surrounded by students and professors. We waited our turn.

When we finally got to him, I immediately received one of his tremendous hand shakes and Nancy one of his best fatherly bear hugs. It was like being back home in North Carolina. Just to be polite, more-or-less, and figuring he would already be tied up by the President or someone, I casually said, "Dr. Freezor, what about having lunch with us before you go back to Waco?"

"I'd be happy to, Son - where do you live?" was his

prompt reply.

Nancy's shocked eyes got as big as a cow's, and she immediately turned to run home and start looking for taters. I lingered a moment, gave him directions, then took off myself like a wild goose - to help get things ready for our honored, but totally unexpected table guest.

One thing I did was to go to a friend's home behind us and borrow a big, upholstered chair for that bare living room. I had just rounded the corner with the thing, clumsily lugging and tugging it along, when up drove Dr. Feezor! My poor, puffing face turned redder than a hybrid tomato as he rushed up to hold open the door for me. I lugged it past him, set it down, and said merrily, "Have a seat, Dr. Feezor, Nancy will have lunch shortly, I'm sure" - which I wasn't. I quickly smothered the scraggly chair with my own squirming carcass!

Well, we had a delicious lunch and wonderful fellowship. Just before he left, Dr. Feezor stood in the naked living room with an arm around Nancy's shoulder, chucked the bubbling baby son under the chin, took my hand, looked down at the adoring Nancy, and said graciously, "You don't have much, son, do you - but you're awfully rich, aren't you?"

I appreciated that deep perception of what life really is. My face finally returned to normal - bad as that is!

REVEREND YATES CAMPBELL - TICKY GOATEE

The Gaston Baptist Association, operating in and around the Gastonia area, with its 99 churches and more than 42,000 members, is one of the largest, strongest, and most efficient of 80 such Associations in the state. Things move along under the steady leadership of Superintendent of Missions, Rev. Richard Spencer, and his noble staff.

One member of that noble staff is genial, talented, and experienced Rev. Yates Campbell, who serves as the association's Minister and Director of Christian Social Services. His vast and varied experiences in Baptist affairs in several states over the years eminently fit him for his present role in the Gaston Association. He directs the funds and resources of the association as it seeks to minister to the needy, the vagrant, the

itinerant, the down-and-out, the broken, the distressed, with no human being in need within the bounds of the association existing outside his love and concern and efforts. He ministers to one and all without fear or favor.

I imagine, by its very nature, that most of his work is pretty grim and serious. He constantly runs into problems that are difficult to solve and peculiar needs that are hard to meet, but he keeps trying. But all is not without its light moments along the way, and Yates retains a delightful sense of humor, even in the most morbid circumstances, and his infectious laugh is often heard in the land. He can entertain you by the hour with his "humorous experiences."

He recently reported, for instance, on the case where he was working with some migrant workers, trying to see that they had adequate food and housing, with some of them living in tents while in that area. He made several trips out to check on things and offer his services - including spiritual assistance, of course, as needed.

His phone rang one early morning and the gruff voice of one of his tented workers greeted him. He recognized the voice immediately.

"Yea, Ruff, what can I do for you this morning?" asked Yates, kindly and sleepily.

"Well, I got problems this morning, Reverend," he said slowly.

"Such as?" continued Yates, yawning.

"For one thing, I don't have no lantern for my tent."

"That's bad, I guess - might stumble over something in the dark."

"That ain't the worst, for I don't have no razor, neither."

"Every man oughtta have a razor."

"But that ain't the worst yet, Reverend - I've got a tick in my goatee!"

"Well, my brother, said Yates, giggling through his own thick beard, "I'll see if I can round up a flashlight, a safety razor, and a can of insect repellent - that oughtta fix up your dark tent, your prickly face, and your ticky goatee!"

If you ever go to hear big, jovial Ben Fisher make a speech you can always count on a good tale or two before he gets around to the actual speech-making - and several more in the course of the speech. I heard him about a year ago in Asheboro, and he came across with another good one. I guess the story illustrates the trusting steadfastness of simple-mindedness, though he didn't indicate what he was trying to prove - just told it. That's enough.

Seems, according to Ben, one early spring a certain eastern college football coach went off up into the backwoods and coal mining areas of Kentucky in desperate search of some big, raw-boned prospects to add missing beef and brawn to his thin, weak line. He finally happened upon one towering fellow who caused his heart to greatly accelerate in drooling anticipation - a young, massive, hulking coal miner who looked like a direct descendant of the ancient Cyclops, sizewise - tall, muscular, hard and brawny - a perfect prospect - weighing at least 275 pounds.

It turned out that the young man was most anxious to break away from the drudgery of mining and get out into the world, so the coach had no trouble "signing him up" right on the spot.

In order to protect his fresh acquisition from other schools, the coach arranged for the young miner to move down to his home town for the summer, where he got him a job unloading ships at the local docks, saying, "This will strengthen your muscles, keep you trim, and have you ready to go this fall." The coach carefully checked on him every day to make sure things were going right and that he wasn't being bothered by other aspiring coaches.

One day the future lineman was assigned the task of unloading about 50 big iron blacksmith's anvils, and stacking them on the pier for shipment out later. They furnished him a dolly, but the fellow spurned all mechanical help. He had hands like two turkey platters and huge arms like ditch drain pipes, so he just reached down, closed each powerful hand over the top of an anvil, picked them up, walked off the boat, placed them on the pier, and went back for two more. Everyone around, on ship and shore, looked on with sheer amazement at the sight, and by the time of his fourth trip quite a crowd

had gathered to watch the operation. He swung along with those anvils like they were two empty buckets.

Well, on the fifth trip, as he came down the gangplank with an anvil in each hand, the rickety gangplank gave way under the weight, and the Kentuckian and his anvils went plunging through into about 40 feet of salty water.

He sank, bobbed up, sputtered, sank again, but reappeared shortly with his head up, and furiously treading water with both feet, but making no forward progress.

A group of rough dock workers edged close and looked down on him with great amusement. As he kept treading water, keeping his head afloat, they just kept laughing and offered no assistance.

After a few minutes of this impasse, the anvil-toter exclaimed through mouthfuls of water, "Effen one of you gents don't soon help me a bit, I'm jest gonna be plumb bound to let go one of these here anvils!"

DR. BEN FISHER - OVER COOKED

Readers of this column have already been introduced to gigantic Ben Fisher, and I'll not go through that again, except to say he's a mighty big, but now retired, Baptist. Folks who meet, see, and hear Ben seldom forget him. Most of the time this works to his advantage, but there are times when it doesn't.

For instance, several years ago when Ben was in his hey-day working for the Christian Education Council, he was with a group of us in some meetings in the Asheville area. The first morning there, we descended on famous "Buck's Restaurant" on Tunnel Road for some of his good coffee, eggs, ham, honey, and biscuits.

A slender, bouncy, pert, brunette waitress came over with a cheery "Good Morning, Gentlemen," and stood ready to take our orders. I ordered "the works," as I can eat anything I can catch, but Ben didn't, though he could have held everything in the whole place. At the time, his doctors were trying to reshape his elephantine proportions and had him on a strict diet, including specific instructions as to how his food was to be cooked. Consulting his breakfast chart from the doctor, Ben ordered "two soft poached eggs on light toast," and

grunted in hungry dismay.

When the waitress finally returned with our orders, she set two wide-eyed poached eggs before Ben resting loosely in those little cups they use - no toast.

"Little girl," said Ben, "that's not what and how I ordered. Where's the toast?"

"Oh," she said apologetically, consulting her pad, "I'm sorry. I'll take them back."

The rest of us prayed and dug in while Ben twiddled his restless thumbs and drooled at the mouth.

The girl brought the eggs again - on toast - set them down and turned away.

Ben called her back. "Little girl, I'm sorry, but I just can't eat this, for now you've gotten the eggs too hard and dry - I have to have them very soft."

She screwed up her brow, looked askance at him for a moment, but removed the eggs, saying, "Sorry sir - I'll fix it. We'll just do the order over."

Well, sir, the third time she brought them things, Ben took one sad look, and intoned, "Little girl, I declare, I can't eat this either - you've put butter on the toast, and that'd kill me!"

With the rest of us laughing like mad into our coffee, she took off for the fourth time toward the kitchen, with Ben crying after her, "Just bring anything you want to, little girl - I'll eat it and promise not to die on the premises!"

Well, over two years later, Ben happened to be back in the area and went to Buck's for breakfast. When he sat, here came that same little brunette waitress. She did a double-take, stopped short, placed her pad on the table, put hands on her hips, looked at Ben with fire in her eyes, and demanded strongly, "All right, Grouchy, let's get started on them eggs!"

DR. BEN FISHER - SIT ON IT

Dr. Ben C. Fisher recently retired from his position as Executive Secretary of the Education Commission for the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tennessee, and returned to his native North Carolina. Nothing pleases me more highly than to have Ben Fisher back among North Carolina Baptists. My personal link with Ben goes back to the fall of 1937 when I struggled with him on Dr. George

Paschal's Greek class at Wake Forest College, though Ben, being a scholar, didn't have to struggle very much, not like I did, at any rate.

Before going to Nashville, Ben spent many years serving North Carolina in the field of Christian Education - first at Gardner Webb College, then at Wake Forest College, and, finally, as Secretary of the Christian Higher Education Council, working out of Raleigh. His footprints across the state are large, many, and permanent.

Now Ben was, and is, a big Baptist - any way you want to look at it, but especially physically. You could chop him up and make forty of me, with 20 pounds left over. In his hey-day, Ben has soared up into the neighborhood of 300 pounds hung on a towering frame. You don't have any trouble seeing him whenever he's in the general vicinity, and his imposing presence is always noted and felt in any gathering.

On one particular occasion I got a big kick and laugh out of his gargantuan proportions. In the fall of 1954, while serving as Missionary in the Mount Zion Association (Burlington), I had Ben come over from Raleigh and address our annual meeting on "The Value of Education" - especially for our preacher boys. We met in the Moore's Chapel Church in Saxapahaw, and the building was packed out.

Ben did a splendid job, spicing his address with his unmatched humor, and greatly inspired the whole congregation. He stressed the need and importance of education in helping to achieve the top in any profession, but warned that the educational process was tedious and arduous, exacting a terrible toll sometimes in terms of time, resources, and effort, but well worth the price. He urged the preachers, for the sake of a God-honoring ministry, to be willing to pay that price.

He ended by saying, "There are two ways a fellow can get to the top of an oak tree. First he can pick out a big tree, approach it, roll up his sleeves, spit on his hands, wrap his legs around the boll, grab a hold with his arms, and start climbing - pulling, grunting, and pushing until he finally makes the top - scratched and bleeding, perhaps, but on the top nevertheless. Second, the long, lazy way, he can plant an acorn - and sit on it."

I followed Ben on the program, and eyeing him facetiously as he sat before me on the front row, I said,

"It's most obvious that Ben has made it to the tip top of his big oak tree - and I know now just how he got there - he grunted, sweated, pulled, clawed, bled, and dug his way up--for the Good Lord hasn't yet created the acorn that could get out of the ground with Ben Fisher sitting on it!"

REVEREND FELIX WAGNER - TASTY MORSEL

North Carolina Baptists operate a big assembly on the coast at historic Fort Caswell on Oak Island below Southport. Baptists by the thousands flock there from all over the state, especially during the summer, for retreats, study, fellowship and recreation.

In addition to surf, sand and sun in the low-lying region, one of the outstanding, but pesky, features of the area is its swarms of vicious, blood-sucking mosquitoes - day and night.

Those who know come prepared and equipped to deal with the mean critters - nets of all sizes, swatters by the dozens, and insect repellent by the gallons - or else one is likely to lose forty pounds of firm flesh and three gallons of red blood during a week's stay. Uninformed strangers often get caught unawares and pay the dire consequences. If it's a hot, humid windless night, the mosquitoes have a field-day with unwary strangers and gorge themselves to the seams with good, tasteful Baptist blood. I got caught unprepared several years ago and my thin veins are still weak and shriveled.

I've heard some awful tales about the size and ferocity of eastern North Carolina mosquitoes from hapless victims, but Felix Wagner about topped them all with one about the menacing ones flying around in his native Mississippi swamps. I've gone through Mississippi several times but didn't linger long enough to get on biting terms with the state's mosquitoes - thank goodness, especially when I consider the gigantic insects described by Wagner.

Felix, of "Wagner Church Related Ministries," and his wife, Betty, have traveled, preached, taught and sung all over the world, and are truly a dynamic couple.

Speaking at Caswell Assembly to a W.M.U. meeting, and scratching North Carolina mosquito bites as he spoke, he told the awed ladies about the special brand of mosquitoes that hover over certain parts of Mississippi, and duly

warned them to avoid that section whenever they traveled through the state.

According to Wagner, seems once that a pair of the winged varmints was zinging along overhead on a hunt for food, getting hungrier every second. Suddenly, they spied a large, unwary lady ambling along a trail beside the forest, promptly swooped down on her, easily scooped her up between them, and took off over the tree tops toward their abode deep in the swamp.

Enroute with the poor, defenseless, but screaming and struggling lady, the mosquitoes began a discussion of just what and how to do with her.

Said one loudly, buzzing eagerly above the continued screams, "Do you think we should stop and eat her now, or take her back to the nest first and eat her there?"

Answered the other hungry one, flicking his avid proboscis, "Let's just stop and eat her now, for if we take her back to the nest those mean ole big 'uns will take her away from us!"

DR. CECIL A RAY - NORTH CAROLINA CALLED

For several years Dr. Cecil A. Ray has been the dynamic Executive Secretary of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, and is doing a tremendous job in his alpine position, from which he inspires and leads over a million Southern Baptists in North Carolina. Few men in any position - political, religious, educational, or otherwise - exert and maintain a greater influence over "The Old North State" than he does.

However, North Carolina is Dr. Ray's "adopted" state, for he was Texas born, bred, and reared - and it's next to impossible to completely "unTexas" a Texan! Until his acceptance of his North Carolina position, his life and ministry had been Texas based, and he had no idea, I dare say, of ever changing it if left strictly to his own plans and devices.

But the Lord "moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform," and to get the average Texan to move to North Carolina usually takes a mysterious Divine wonder in full operation. So, it took God, and God only, to move Dr. Cecil Ray to North Carolina!

We have the sure word on this fact from a most reliable source - Dr. Gene Garrison, pastor of the

sprawling First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

In speaking to a state-wide gathering of Baptists in Greensboro, Dr. Garrison, who is a long-time friend of Ray's and himself a Texan, related a story about the affair that made the rounds out in the Southwest which dramatically showed the "behind-the-scene" workings which finally produced the decision by Dr. Ray to sadly forsake the Texas Longhorns, and joyfully take up getting Tar on his Heels.

Seems that back when North Carolina Baptists were searching for a good qualified replacement for the retired Dr. Perry Crouch, God led them way off down in Texas to Dr. Ray - and he was invited to come as a direct result of Divine revelation.

But Ray, at that time the Director of Stewardship for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, decided that he had better do some consulting with The Divine for himself, also; so he approached the Good Lord in humble petition and asked, "Lord do You really want me to leave a place like Texas and go up to North Carolina?"

"Yes, I do," answered the Lord in straight, certain terms.

"Well," replied the hesitant, Ray, "give me some time to think about that."

Three days later, after a terrible inner struggle and much serious thought, Dr. Ray came back to the Lord and said, "Lord, I'll go up to North Carolina on just one condition."

"What's that?" inquired the Lord.

"That You go with me," requested Ray.

"Well," replied the Lord, "give me some time to think about that."

The deep-rooted Texan returned to the Lord after four days to settle things once for all. "Now, Lord, if I forsake Texas and head for North Carolina, will You go up with me?" he asked anxiously.

In reply, the Good Lord spoke seriously and solemnly, "All right, Cecil, you head on up to North Carolina, and I faithfully promise that I surely will go with you--as far as Atlanta, Georgia!"

Well, North Carolina Baptists are mighty grateful that, somehow, Dr. Ray made it the rest of the way on his own!

REVEREND JIMMIE MORGAN - HAIR AND HIDE

I'm certainly not endowed with any world-shaking physical attributes, but I do have one outstanding asset - a head of thick hair - so far! And I have a son out in Indiana who has enough long, crow-black hair to fully stuff the living room sofa, with enough left over for the rear seat of the family car; so the present generation of Wilkie men are amply blessed with hair.

And I gleefully exploit mine at every opportunity in the presence of my bald-headed preacher friends here and there. I jibe, joke, tease, and taunt them unmercifully, and they kindly "put up with it" without resorting to unchristian violence. They let me call them "The Shining Dome," or "The Great Bald Eagle," or "Old Skin Flint," or "The Rock," and such like things, without doing me in, or jerking out my greying head of hair in fits of jealousy.

However, ole R. E. Carter, who is pastor of Clarendon Baptist Church, and whose round head looks like a freshly laid ostrich egg, put the clamps on my jesting one day. As I lightly patted his naked pate, I patronizingly asked, "Carter, do you want me to give you some hair? I have enough for both of us." He stared at me with an air of utter disgust and said strongly, "I was born with a head full of hair exactly like yours, Wilkie; but when I got old enough to have some sense I yanked it all out by the roots so I wouldn't grow up looking like you!" I didn't have any come-back for that uncalled-for insult - and just kept my hair.

But the best I ever heard on baldness came through Rev. Dick Whitley back in the fifties here in Kinston. Dick was pastor of the New Hope Church at the time and was serving as Moderator for a big Neuse Associational Training Union Rally to be held at First Baptist Church in Kinston.

For his main speaker at the important rally, Dick had enlisted the late Jimmie Morgan from Raleigh, a dynamic layman, who served as state-wide Director for Baptist Training Unions, and whose well-known head (among Baptists, at least) looked like my kitchen linoleum after a good mopping - clean as a whistle and gleaming like a polished brass bell. Jimmie used to claim that he enjoyed combing his hair with a wash cloth, saying, "I don't have less hair - just more face!"

On the way down from Raleigh, by pre-arrangement,

Jimmie stopped at my house for supper and fellowship. Being old friends, we carelessly suppered and fellowshiped way past starting time for Dick's big rally. Jimmie finally crept up to the rostrum long after things had gotten underway, with Dick looking daggers at him.

When he got ready to introduce his main speaker, Dick described how worried he had been when he couldn't find his speaker before having to start the meeting.

He reported that he went out into the crowded vestibule for one last, hopeful look.

After straining his eyeballs with searching the milling crowd moving into the church, he cried out loudly, with hands cupped to his mouth, "Has anyone seen that Jimmie Morgan? I've been looking high and low and haven't seen hide nor hair of him yet."

He further reported that someone yelled back at him, "Dick, if you're looking for Jimmie Morgan, quit looking for hair--he's all hide!"

DR. CARLYE DRIGGERS - THE BIG BOOT

The usual, traditional admonition is to "never underestimate a woman," and admittedly, a woman is a mysterious, unpredictable creature in most cases. However, on the other side of the ledger, the male species can be the same, or even worse. When conditions are just right, a man can be just as underestimatable as any woman who ever lived.

Speaking to the annual meeting of the West Virginia Baptist Convention convening at Fairlea, Dr. Carlyle Driggers, told of just such an incident when a high school football coach apparently grossly underestimated his redoubtable, untried third-string quarterback.

Late in a close, important game, the frustrated coach was forced to go to the third stringer when his first-liner suffered a broken leg and was lost for good; then, on his first play, the talented second-string quarterback was rudely sacked on his own 10 yard line, had the breath knocked out of him, and couldn't continue for the moment. The coach cried as he was being carried off the field.

With three plays left in the series and his team backed up 90 yards from the goal line, the worried, doubting coach reluctantly called over the eager

third-stringer, who had never seen a second's action in any game, and laboriously gave him careful and specific instructions for each of the three plays, merely designed to stall for time until his second-stringer could regain strength for the next possession. The greenhorn was told to hand off to the halfback on the first play; back up on the second and just throw the ball down field as far as he could - hopefully over all heads to fall harmlessly in the open; then take the snap on the third play and punt the ball as far as he could, getting the team out of the hole if possible. As the inexperienced fellow trotted onto the field, the weeping coach knelt in prayer.

On his first go, the raw quarterback managed to ram the ball into the halfback's stomach without fumbling, and the resourceful runner found a hole over right tackle, cut left, and skipped down the sideline for a long gain to the enemy's 45 yard line.

The next play saw the fledgling retreat, dodge an initial tackler, get set, and let go a wild, wobbly pass down the middle that was really "up for grabs." However, the tight end came running over from an angle, made a mighty leap among a crowd of defenders, snagged the ball, came down on the one-yard line, and even the coach jumped for joy at these unexpected results.

The third play saw the dutiful quarterback take the snap, step back, then haul off and punt the ball plumb up and out of the stadium. Everyone watched in dumbfounded shock, as the opposition got the ball on their 20-yard line, of course.

The furious coach jumped all over his third-stringer as he came trotting off the field, head down. "What in tarnation are you doing, fellow!" he ranted, grabbing him by the collar. "What in the devil were you thinking about out there, anyway? What, pray tell, what?"

"Well, retorted the unflappable punter, "I was thinking to myself that our team sure has the dumbest coach I ever heard of!"

REVEREND CHARLES GATWOOD - A GOOD VIEW

As most of my friends and co-workers know, I've been on assignment for North Carolina Baptists up in West Virginia since January, 1981, in a cooperative project between North Carolina and West Virginia Baptists to

establish 100 new churches in that beautiful mountain state by 1985. The work has been interesting, different, and satisfying.

One of the first things I did after arriving in West Virginia was journey up to Ripley to speak at a stewardship conference in the West Ripley Baptist Church. The little church, established in 1968, occupies the top of a small mountain right in the middle of West Ripley owning over 9 acres of prime mountain top. You get an excellent and inspiring view of the city and surrounding area from the elevated church grounds.

It was a cold, clear, full-moon winter night when I arrived, and I walked around the church before going inside to get a hasty view of the city and lights, noticing a lake shimmering in the moonlight below as I walked behind the building. I was impressed.

Later, when I stood to speak, I congratulated the folks on their beautiful church and setting, commending their choice of site, but didn't go into any details on the matter.

In late summer, talented and ebullient Charles Gatwood, Director of Music for North Carolina Baptists, working out of Raleigh, came up to Ripley to share his knowledge and expertise with the good people in a music clinic. No better man for that kind of job exists, and he has been a keen factor in church music across North Carolina for the past several years. He's tops. He could get a bunch of plow mules in a choir loft and have them braying "Amazing Grace" in perfect harmony in no time flat. His constant smile is as sweet as his music.

He arrived at the church early, so had time to inspect things, taking the tour around the church as I had done, except he was looking things over in the broad daylight and got a different, clearer perspective than I did. But the Lord doesn't look after music men like he does ignorant preachers, and old Charles got in a fix from his detailed sightseeing.

He, too, felt led to congratulate the folks on their pretty setting, saying, "sometimes you have to get away from home to really appreciate the beauty around you, as you tend to take things at home for granted. I had quite an exhilarating, fresh spiritual experience as I viewed your unusual setting just now. I was out behind the church, looked down on that beautiful lake, and stood transfixed there for a full ten minutes - just drinking it

all in 'til I was full to the brim."

The folks roared with laughter, punching each other in pure glee.

"What's the matter - did I say something wrong?" asked the puzzled Charles.

I think the good music man discovered he had hit the wrong key and struck a sour note in there somewhere, as a tittering lady finally spoke up and said, "Well, Brother Gatwood, that lake is the city's sewage and waste-disposal lagoon!"

"Uh!" came back the unflappable Charles, "then I reckon we'd better first sing 'Washed in the Blood' before getting around to 'Shall We Gather at the River.'"

MR. L. L. MORGAN - HALF WAY UP

One of the most influential men in my early life and ministry was Mr. L. L. Morgan, whose distinguished career in Sunday School work for North Carolina Baptists extended over two decades. He was a small man physically, but a giant spiritually. Though he's no longer with us in body, his mark remains on hundreds of churches over the state and his ineffaceable stamp on thousands of lives, such as my own. He afforded me some of my first experiences in church work, overlooked my green ineptness, and continued to use me in his various campaigns. I owe him much, indeed.

He believed in, taught, and promoted the development of "Standard Sunday Schools" as the best vehicle for teaching the Bible to children and adults, and scores of Sunday Schools operate from that context today because of his relentless efforts and labors.

Morgan was a wise expert on the matter of proper church buildings, and was a strong, progressive advocate of buildings planned, suited, and adapted to efficient Bible teaching. He would travel miles and miles and work into the night to help any church plan and build an adequate, functional educational plant.

I often heard him say, however, that it was remarkable that some churches were doing as well as they were, considering the small, poorly arranged, and ill-planned buildings in which they operated - that they got anything worthwhile accomplished was in itself a miracle, and he heartily, but rather facetiously,

congratulated the church.

He said that it reminded him of a certain skinny, under-fed, rag-a-muffin-of-a-boy named Johnny. Johnny came dragging home from school one afternoon looking like he had joined the defeated British around New Orleans in running helter-skelter through the brush and bramble "all the way to the Gulf of Mexico." He certainly looked as if he had lost the war, at any rate.

His anguished mother threw up her hands in utter despair when she viewed him - his clothes hung on him in tatters, both cheeks sported livid mouses, his black left eye looked like a lump of Kentucky coal, his upper lip was split and bleeding, both ears were scratched and bruised, and school books were in total disarray.

"Johnny!" she cried, kneeling beside him, "just look at you! What happened? What have you been doing?"

"Fightin'," muttered Johnny through loose teeth.

"Fighting? What with, pray tell - a kodiak bear?" pressed the distressed mother, stroking back his hair to look at his eye.

"Naw - just ole Joe Dinks," whined Johnny, pulling back.

"Joe Dinks? That mean, monstrous bully?"

"That's the one, awright," answered Johnny resolutely.

"Have you lost your mind, Johnny? Why he's twice as tall, big, and heavy as you. How foolish can you get? Why didn't you run? Just look at you - you're a mess - you're a bloody mess - just look at you!" the mother cried, shaking him in frustration.

"Yea, I guess so," answered Johnny, straightening and throwing back his shoulders, "but you oughtta take a look at Joe Dinks, too, ma. I beat the pure living oozing mud outta him--fer up as I could reach!"

DR. EARLY BRADLEY - GRINDING IT OUT

When I came to my present position with North Carolina Baptists 26 years ago, my "boss man" was Earle Bradley, Director of the Stewardship Division - a dynamic preacher who was about as big as a minute and as loud as Big Ben at high noon when he got "into gear," and he geared it up often. His steel-blue eyes, penetrating gaze, and fiery voice made his presence known and felt

everywhere he went. Earle died in the mid-sixties, at age 60, but he certainly lives on in my heart, memory, and gratitude. In the work, he didn't "stir up a hornet's nest" - he was the hornet's nest! When his facile tongue got to stinging sin, it was awesome.

It is said that the mark of a good leader and administrator is the ability to delegate responsibility - to make judicious assignments to subordinates and trust them to carry on. He was a most industrious, dedicated, faithful worker in every way, but on occasion, ole Earle was the best "delegator" I ever saw. He trusted his staff implicitly.

I recall one time when he, myself, and Guy Cain were scheduled for a big Stewardship Clinic way up in the mountains, involving a long trip, "tons" of boxes of materials, and three hours of teaching. He exercised his delegatory expertise to a "T" on this venture.

First, he delegated me to leave Kinston by 5:00 a.m., be in Raleigh by 7 o'clock to load all those heavy boxes of stuff into his and Guy's cars - leaving room for him and a silken pillow in the back seat when he further delegated me to park my car and drive his. He had a good, easy 250-mile trip with a chauffeur who ended up with stiff knees, a sore back, and tired blood over six hours later. When we got into our motel rooms in late afternoon, Earle called Guy and me in and said sheepishly, "Boys, I've got the sniffles tonight, so I'm gonna give you fellows the privilege of carrying the ball. You both know the materials and can take turns at teaching until you're through it - and, Wilkie, you can wind it up - be sure to gather all unused materials and get them back into the cars. I'll be praying for you."

Earle was an avid reader of detective stories, and before we left the room he was propped up in bed with two or three detective magazines. He had a dozen more in his suitcase!

Guy and I went to the church, unloaded and distributed most of the materials, talked to about 200 folks until our throats were raw, cleaned up, reloaded left-overs - and then went looking for a pepperoni pizza and large pepsi which Earle had delegated for a late supper upon our return. We got back at a late hour, all right.

Earl reported that he had read two of the best stories he had ever seen, got a good nap, and was now

hungry as a bear.

I quickly got him propped back up, spread a napkin, plopped the warm pizza in his lap, poured his big pepsi, and adjusted his pillow. Guy and I flopped wearily into nearby chairs.

Speaking through globs of sticky cheese, Earle said seriously, "You know, boys, this hard grind on the road is tough--I wonder if all these Baptists over the state know how we're killing ourselves in their behalf?"

DR. J. C. PIPES - WHEN IT COMES UP

This year, 1982, marks my twenty-fifth anniversary as an employee of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina - I've been a field worker, promotional man, and general run-around all over this great state during all this time. However, I'm closing out things by spending a lot of time these days with West Virginia Baptists, going back and forth once a month between the two states, but still as an employee of North Carolina Baptists - which would take too much space to explain!

Anyway, I believe I've learned a few things during this varied and exciting quarter of a century - especially about Baptists. But, I didn't start out with very much knowledge, for in 1957 when the Convention hired me, I "didn't know from nothing," and was one little confused, mixed-up stack of theological bones. Things were dark.

They brought me in to carry on the work of old J.C. Pipes up in the mountains as a "General Missionary to Western North Carolina." The inimitable Pipes had been on the field up there over 20 years and was an impossible act to follow. Guidelines for the work were skimpy and scarce back then, and Dr. M. A. Huggins, Executive Secretary, just put an arm around my shoulder and said in fatherly fashion, "Son, go on up to the mountains and work for the Baptists." That was about the sum total of my instructions for the work, and I lit out for the hills like Father Abraham going up from Ur of the Chaldees "unto a land he knew not of."

I got up there on them mountains and I didn't know which way to turn or start. I didn't know which end was up anywhere, and if one was up, I surely didn't know where it was coming down. I had one preaching date on the book - beyond that, mid-night!

In utter desperation, I sought out Pipes at his retirement home in Asheville, sat him down, and started a flurry of questions. The first one was simply, "Pipes, just what am I supposed to do as a General Missionary up here?" There was pathos in my plea.

Pipes pulled his glasses down over his long nose and in his unique, gravelly voice, said "Lord, Wilkie, I don't know."

I did a shocking double-take, and begged, "Surely, after over 20 years of this, you know something - anything. I'm at zero!"

He mused a little while longer, then finally said slowly, "Well, about all I know to tell you is to just get out there on the field - and whatever comes up - do it!"

That was about all the help I got out of the rascal, and it surely didn't sound like much at the time. But he was a wise old owl, and knew what he was doing, for his words have become my one, sure guideline in the work during all these long years, and represent the one certain thing that I have learned, if nothing else -- for I know for a surety, where Baptists are concerned, brother, if it doesn't come up, you'd better not presume to pull it up!

DR. J. C. PIPES - IT'S IN THE CAN

One of the most remarkable achievements of my whole life was to make an "A" on Dr. G. Earl Guinn's first-year preaching class at the Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1948. It was also Dr. Guinn's first year of teaching in the Homiletical Department, and I mean he was rough, tough, and demanding on budding preachers. Out of a "congregational" class of 285 that year, just six of us managed to make an "A." During my last two years, I served as one of Dr. Guinn's Graders," thus had a whole lot to do with who made good grades from then on out.

A regular weekly assignment in his freshman classes was to turn in a sermon outline based on an assigned text, consisting of a written Introduction and Conclusion, in addition to the actual outline; so I handled an average of about 90 sermon outlines each week as my part of the grading task.

These were supposed, and expected to be fresh and original outlines, but all along, I'd catch some of the fellows merely turning in outlines straight out of a book,

such as J. O. Williams' "Seeds for Sermons," or Hyman Appleman's "Sermon Outlines," which I happened to possess, among others, so I could compare. I'll admit that I used the books to "generate ideas," but not to copy verbatim the outlines.

There was enough of this stuff to where I developed an aversion to "homiletical Laziness" and I never failed to put a big red "F" on such papers, along with a note saying, "Make your own outline - good or bad." Dr. Guinn "saw red" when he became aware of this practice of copying, and applauded the "F" giving.

Later, I carried this deep aversion over into several Associational "Preacher Schools" up in the mountains, where as my part on the program each day, I'd lecture on "Sermon Building," - taking half the hour to show how to make an outline, putting it on the board, then use the last half to haul off and "preach it." I'd strongly stress the worth and good of the preachers forging out their own outline - not just depending on cute little alliterative ones available in dozens of cheap books, like some mentally lazy preachers were prone to do.

But once in a school for the Mitchell Association held in the First Baptist Church, Spruce Pine, ole, retired, venerable J. C. Pipes followed me on the program. We didn't bother to assign him a specific subject for his part, for we knew he'd just take off on anything, in any direction which he chose, and it'd be useless trying to "tie him down." Mountain preachers never had a better friend than J. C. Pipes.

Before anything else, he first "took off" on my lecture. He was, with his knowledge and experience, much more understanding and sympathetic with the busy, rushed, and sometimes frustrating, life of the average preacher than I was at the time.

Looking me straight in the eye, with an amused smile at the corners of his mouth, he declared in his odd, raspy voice, "I appreciate what Brother Wilkie said about you fellows being sure to make your own original outlines - that's fine and good - but I want to tell you, my brethren, there was many a time in my busy life when I'd have starved plumb to death if it hadn't been for canned meat!"

REVEREND E. C. UPCHURCH - A GASTRIC NIGHTMARE

E. C. (Ernest) Upchurch of Raleigh, Director of Research and Analysis for North Carolina Baptists, has the same good initials as I do, but that's about as far as similarity goes, I suspect - and goodness knows, we don't look alike!

He and I have been dear, close friends and co-workers all along the way, for a combined total of nearly 50 years of Convention service between us - but there couldn't be more difference between two Baptist fellows anywhere in the world.

Ernest is most scholarly, detailed and precise, while I'm pretty dumb, piecemeal, and sloppy. He is the epitome of sartorial perfection at all times with every hair in place, while I hate ties, am lucky if my socks happen to match, and never have two hairs on my bushy head pointing the same direction at any given moment. He is always clean, prim, with that well-scrubbed look, while I sport more wrinkles in my britches than a great grandpa's hide and run from bath water like it's poison. He is an expert at a polished desk, turning out erudite research papers, tracts, and learned treatises, while I lounge at my kitchen tale and scratch out shallow columns. He is an organizer and master at giving directions, while I fall to pieces every day and can't even get my dog to sit up straight. In speaking and teaching, he is calm, reserved, and even-toned, while I jump around like a toad and run up and down the voice ladder like a mad fireman.

But I must say that my very first encounter with Upchurch really left a bad taste in my mouth, and I'm not over it yet. It came over 30 years ago early in our careers when he was pastor of the Kelford and Lewiston churches and I was holding forth at Kennedy Home in Kinston.

He called and requested that I come to his churches for Thanksgiving services to promote the annual offering for the Homes. I carried some children along to sing and after the morning service at Kelford, the church folks took the kids for Thanksgiving dinner and I went home with E.C. for turkey and gravy - to get better acquainted with new-found friends.

During the fine meal I casually remarked, "This is good eating, brother. The traditional old turkey and dressing can't be beat, but do you know some crazy folks

spoil Thanksgiving dinners by serving mince meat pie, which tastes like spoiled, raw horse meat to me and turns my stomach inside out - I'd rather have a good can of dog food!"

Well, later at the conclusion, Mrs. Upchurch cleared the table, then came prancing from the kitchen with the biggest, thickest piece of mince meat pie I ever saw in my life, set the thing under my nose, served herself and Ernest, then proceeded to lead in the eating. I was trapped, hoping they had forgotten what I said previously, and I certainly didn't want to "hurt their feelings."

Neither of those rascals changed expressions and the conversation remained casual until I had gagged every little bite down my gullet, turned blue, cracked a gastric gasket, and got sicker than a corn-stuffed horse.

With the last bitter bite, the wife exploded into tear-producing laughter and old E.C. practically rolled on the floor in glee. They remembered! I've been wary around him ever since - he loves a joke too good. If he tried to serve me mince meat pie today, I'd stuff it down his pressed coat pocket, and to ding-ho with his old "feelings!"

REVEREND EDWARD LAFFMAN - HOW CUM, LAWDY?

The Rev. Edward Laffman of Warrenton is one fellow who really lives up to his name - for anyone familiar with Ed Laffman knows that he is a man chock full of rib-tickling "laffs."

He serves as the Director of Missions for the 30 churches in Vance and Warren Counties which form the Cullom Baptist Association, and has been doing a bang-up job at it for several years. This association was organized from churches coming out of the large Tar River Association and named in honor of one of my old Wake Forest College religious professors, the venerable Dr. W. R. Cullom, who lived into his nineties and touched thousands of lives during the decades of his dynamic teaching at the college.

Ed is a native of New York City, but forsook the cement canyons for the broad plains of Texas where he went to school at Howard Payne College. After this and that here and there, he eventually found his way to North Carolina where he served as pastor of the Baptist Church

in Rowland, then at the Carey Church in Henderson, before assuming his present position in November of 1967. His ministry and influence extend far beyond the bounds of Vance and Warren Counties, however, though most of his time and talents are given in productive service in the Cullom Association.

When he wants relief from the press of preachers, churches, speeches, conferences, classes, office and road work, he draws aside and works with his good wife in her excellent photography projects - and I suppose, hitting the "dark room" when he really wants to get away from it all. Ed himself is a certified professional photographer, so he does something other than just "get in her way," and makes a real contribution to his wife's profession.

I don't know the wife's name, but I'd venture that she's a sight better looking than Ed - and surely has forty times as much hair. Ed's head is rather open country, and no hound-pursued hare would be foolish enough to run up there looking for adequate hairs to cover him from danger!

As an illustration of one of those "laffs," Ed tells about the day he graduated from Howard Payne, saying he must have been a pain to the Payne president. He stood about 20th in line - all robed, capped, tassled, and ready to go. It was a great day in his life.

He said all those before him must have been future Rhodes Scholars, for all he heard as they came up to receive their degrees was "Cum Laude," or "Magna Cum Laude," and a few "Summa Cum Laudes." He said they about "Cum Lauded" the place to death before they got to him.

When it finally came his turn to march forward, reports Ed, the scholarly president eyed him curiously, dropped his arms by side, looked upward as Ed pompously approached, and intoned loud and clear, "How Cum, Lawdy - How Cum?"

Actually, Ed was talking "through his hat," for it is reliably reported that he finished as the top man in the whole class - Good Baptists named for an honored college professor would never even consider hiring a dumb do-do!

DR. O. J. HAGLER - MAGIC MATH

The late Rev. O. J. Hagler of Raleigh worked with the North Carolina Baptist State Convention in the Stewardship

Division for over 15 years, serving about half that time as Director of the division following the death of Earle Bradley. He was one of the best "bosses" I ever worked under, and it was a unique pleasure to labor with him. He left me a rich spiritual legacy for which I'll always be grateful, and one from which I'll draw benefits to the end of my days. His indelible mark remains on hundreds of lives in the state.

Most of the time he carried on his labors under painful conditions, due to a terrible car wreck early in his ministry that left him with a permanent back injury, but you never would have known it, for his spirit and outlook were always cheery and bright, and he was ever one who sought to "minister rather than be ministered unto."

He was a lover and expert teller of good stories, and when he really "got tickled" he was something to see and hear. He had a uninhibited, infectious laugh, that when it got into unrestrained high gear, sounded like a hyena's howl punctuated with goat bleats. I laughed at his laughing. A merry twinkle was always in his eyes, and a permanent smile etched the corners of his mouth. He had a keen mind that was sharper than an Indian Caliph's two-edged sword, and his advice, counsel, and expertise were sought by one and all, including me - often!

One of his favorite stewardship illustrations of miscalculated percentage giving had to do with an innovative chap down in Chatham County, famous for its many rabbits, who got into the rabbit meat business back during World War II when meat was short, along with everything else. He ended up canning and shipping ground rabbit meat all over the country and had a thriving, prosperous business going; so good, in fact, that the government sent an agent to investigate and report on the venture.

The agent's eyes popped when he saw all that rabbit meat on hand and he got most suspicious, finally saying, "Fellow, I know there're a lot of rabbits in Chatham County, but not this many - you're bound to be adding something. You might as well tell me, for we'll do an analysis and find out, anyway."

"Well," owned up the intrepid dealer, "I guess I might as well confess that I throw in a little horse to kinda fill things out."

"Just how much would you say?"

"Oh, about fifty-fifty, I guess."

"How's that?"

"One horse and one rabbit!"

One time during a stewardship clinic, O.J. sent me to the chalk board to figure out for the folks the tithe potential of a certain small church, based on average income of the few members. Fumbling and bumbling with the various figures, I eventually came up with a tithe potential in excess of \$10,000,000! O. J. never forgot that, and from there on wouldn't trust me to figure the cost of a postage stamp.

I finally had to tell him that when I was a senior at Wake Forest College I was still trying to pass freshman math. My strange mathematical figuring proved more times than one that $2 + 2$ equals something besides 4!

DR. JAMES L. PLEITZ - HOW GOOD IT IS!

Dr. James L. Pleitz, effulgent pastor of the ever-expanding Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, is one of the outstanding preachers in the land; so it was not surprising that he was chosen to preach the important annual sermon at a Southern Baptist Convention meeting at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1983. He is widely sought and used by Baptists, as well as other groups and faiths.

During his sermon at Pittsburgh, he gave a pretty good illustration of how things are not always what they seem to be, and that often there are hidden balances that tend to eventually "even things out," despite how one-sided they may appear at any given moment. There are times when you don't exactly "get just what you see" - you get more!

According to Pleitz a certain incident was reputed to have happened back during the Korean War - in Korea. A rambunctious bunch of American officers had their own private quarters in a big house over there just off the base, and it was customary under such conditions to hire a native Korean to come in at regular times for house cleaning, cooking, and general services. They put the tabs on a bright, eager, young Korean male who jumped at the opportunity for employment and security, no matter how hard and menial the tasks.

The care-free, fun-loving officers, with the usual American flair for humor and joking, decided to make life

troublesome and trying for their new employee, and have some fun at his innocent expense. Among other things, they dumped ashes on the floors, rubbed globs of sticky grease on all the pan and pot handles, and suspended a big bucket of water over the door, set to douse him when he entered.

Well, without a word, the young man meekly dried off his wet hair and body, brushed up the dirty floors, rubbed off all the gooey grease, and went about his chores, while the officers secretly giggled and laughed, punching themselves in pure glee.

All the tricky maneuvers, plus some new ones, were repeated the second day, and the reactions were the same - the boy quietly went about his business, showing no response one way or another. They did this for several days, but finally decided they had ribbed him enough, so called him in to let him know their buffoonery was at an end.

They expressed deep appreciation for his services, especially complimenting him on the excellent taste and quality of his unique, native soup, which they had greedily gulped down by the gallons. They assured him that he could work free from harassment from that moment on.

"You mean," asked the Korean, "No more water on door?"

"No more," they chorused.

"And no more ash on floor?" he pressed.

"No more," they insisted strongly.

"And no more grease on pots?"

"Absolutely no more!"

"Fine," said the Korean, smiling and bowing graciously as he retreated backwards from the room, "and no more spit in soup!"

DR. JAMES FORBES - THE CURE

When a person is sick, say with a cold, if he tries all the various remedies that concerned friends suggest and insist on, the next thing to do would be to notify the mortician to get ready for a fresh corpse - for there are enough home remedies for every known disease to kill everybody.

Dr. James Forbes, professor at Union Theological

Seminary, spoke recently at an Interfaith Conference in Louisville, Kentucky - one attended by all kinds of races and faiths. Dr. Forbes is a black, not that it makes any difference, but that fact gives him a head start on "home remedies," for our black friends have had, and do have, remedies for most anything that most folks have never heard of - and which often work!

Early in his ministry he got a desperate call to go minister to a poor lady who was suffering from a terrible, continuous nose bleed. Nothing tried up to that point had staunched the flow, and she was in bad straits, indeed.

When he arrived at the home, three good, concerned female saints were already on hand, gathered around the bed. They were about to give her the mysterious "three" treatment, but couldn't agree on three of what, and were in a pretty heated discussion, while the poor patient bled right on, groaning pitifully.

One insisted that the only cure lay in catching three drops of her blood in a bottle and placing the bottle on the highest point in the room above the nose. Another argued, "Not three drops of blood up high somewhere, but three strips of brown paper held on the upper lip beneath the nose." The third saint directed strongly, "Not something just beneath the nose, but it has to be three cubes of ice in a bag held right on the nose."

Dr. Forbes said he settled the argument by letting each of the sisters do their thing - the blood was caught and set up, the strips of paper put in place, and the ice cubes held firmly on the nose.

"Now, sisters," said Dr. Forbes, my remedy is prayer - I believe in the healing power of prayer, so let us pray."

All quieted down and he prayed earnestly and fervently for about five minutes. When he finished, they looked at the patient, and, lo, the bleeding had stopped completely - healing had come, and she sat up in bed, smiling, and profusely thanking everyone.

"But then" reported Dr. Forbes, "we got into the biggest, loudest argument you ever heard as to which magic remedy had actually done the job! I stood my ground on my remedy, of course, but they finally combined forces against me, and collectively insisted that at least my remedy had to be eliminated because I hadn't used a three in all that praying."

Dr. Forbes said he backed up a bit, eyed them with a

slight smile, and revealed, "Dear sisters, I had a three, all right."

"What?" they chorused.

"Haven't you good church members ever heard of The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?"

MISS SUTHELL WALKER - CURTAIN CALL

Miss Suthell Walker of Raleigh stands tall among Baptist women in North Carolina - literally, but stands "head and shoulders" above the average in more respects than merely the physical, being a towering spiritual leader on many levels, especially in the area of missions.

Since 1975, she has served as Baptist Women Director for the North Carolina Woman's Missionary Union, traveling the state, touching and influencing hundreds of lives from seaside to mountainside. An encounter with Suthell Walker, personally or public, is a life-revolutionizing experience, and you don't remain the same after meeting and hearing her. She'll move you - up or down!

A native of Spindale, she was educated at Gardner-Webb College, Carson-Newman College, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Before coming back to North Carolina, she served in the Caddo Baptist Center in Shreveport, Louisiana, and in the Baptist Goodwill Center at Lexington, Kentucky, which provided her with many experiences in raw "first-hand" missions, thus wonderfully preparing her for her present eminent work and position.

A while back, the wife and I had Suthell for an overnight guest in our home when she came to Kinston for a mission study at our church, the Spilman Memorial Baptist. She not only blessed our home, but left an impact on our church that will live for ages to come.

In one segment of her varied study on missions, she dealt with the matter of "talking versus doing and feeling versus action," stressing that merely to talk and feel missions, though necessary, would not get the job done - something more is needed. She drove her point home with a disturbing, thought-provoking illustration that both shamed and challenged. It struck home to me, at least!

She told of this middle-aged, well-to-do, couple in a certain big city who attended a missions conference in their church where they heard different missionaries

present the hurts and needs of the world with passionate pleas for meaningful involvement. They went to a fine restaurant after services for a late supper, where they sat at the table discussing the meeting, agreeing that the matter of world missions was important, indeed, to Christians, and asserting that folks certainly should be doing more in the area of missions.

During the meal, three dirty, ragged, cold, hungry little street urchins came and pressed their noses against the window, gazing with gaunt, wide eyes at the sumptuous food inside. Their collective stares honed in on the dining couple.

"Just look at those dirty little children," she said, "something ought to be done about them."

"Yes," he answered between bites, "but what can we do, dear?"

"Well, I certainly can do something," she answered strongly. She rose from her seat, went over to the window, summarily drew the curtains shut, returned to her chair, pulled her sable closer around her neck, adding "Now, that's much better - what were you saying about missions, dear?"

DR. PERRY CROUCH - I'VE GOT IT!

For over a decade, in years spanning the sixties and seventies, the Executive Secretary of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention was Dr. Perry Crouch, who in retirement is still busy and active among Baptists, especially with those in his beloved mountains. One of the high privileges of my life was to be a member of the staff during his whole tenure.

I've known, loved, respected, and followed Dr. Crouch for over 40 years. He first came into my life in the late thirties up at Ridgecrest Assembly, where as college students, in love and courting, Nancy and I sat in his lively conferences for young people - when we could get in, for his dynamic conferences were popular and crowded, and you had to be early to get a seat. He is an informed expert on love, courtship and family life, including the untimely loss of his first wife, a fine grandchild, and a beloved son, but he carries on in remarkable fashion, and remains an inspiration to all who know him, along with his present lovely wife, "Kitty."

Dr. Crouch came to the Convention after long and fruitful pastorates, among others, at the First Baptist Churches of Fayetteville and Asheville - especially at Asheville, where he built a great church, both physically and spiritually. And he continued the building process in both areas with the Convention, leading expansion programs on every level and in every phase of the work. He was a tireless leader.

Now, it's a funny and strange thing, but despite all the years and times we were together, including the closeness of several meals in our home and hours spent with him at his summer home at Lake Lure, Dr. Crouch never got my first name "down pat." He also had trouble with Marse Grant, Editor of "The Biblical Recorder," and always called him "Marsh."

With a scattered staff of over 125, he took a personal interest in each and knew all by first names, of course, but he just never got my first name solidly in mind, evidently. I was always in a state of amused anticipation of what he'd call me next. He went through a five-year period where he'd see me occasionally when I'd come in from the field for a staff meeting and heartily greet me as "Cliff." Someone, not me, must have told him that wasn't right, so for the next five years I was "Cletus." That tickled my co-worker, Harold White, and the rascal calls me Cletus to this day. I don't mind, for it keeps Dr. Crouch fresh and vibrant in my mind.

However, just before he retired, at the close of a staff meeting, Dr. Crouch said, "Cleve, would you lead us in a closing prayer?"

I did a double-take and sat with wide-eyed amazement, as that was the first time he'd ever called me "Cleve" since he had come to the Convention, and I thought that maybe I had finally "arrived." I recovered from the initial shock enough to lead in a short prayer, during which I thanked the Good Lord for Dr. Crouch, his leadership ability, and his evident love and concern for his large staff.

At the conclusion, Dr. Crouch said, "Thank you, Cletus - now back to work everyone!"

Rev. E. J. Hines for several years has been the busy, talented, productive Director of Missions for the New River Baptist Association around Jacksonville, which includes the massive Camp LeJeune complex.

But prior to his preaching and missionary days, he was a school teacher and farmer in the Holly Ridge area - also, prior to marriage. He remedied the marital situation by finding "The One," and setting about making appropriate plans for wedded bliss.

He rented a house in Holly Ridge that was to become his "vine-covered cottage" of fulfilled dreams, and moved in by himself to make things ready and suitable for his future bride's arrival a week later.

The first day with the new house found him running late on his schedule. He stopped by the farm on the way from school, got tied up, and soon realized he'd be late for a P.T.A. meeting that night.

He rushed to the house, dirty and sweaty, in dire need of a bath, and started declothing his carcass at the door, arriving at the bathroom ready for action. He turned on the shower, stepped into the middle of the tub, drew the curtain, grabbed the soap and started lathering up like a mad dog.

At his first real glance down, he immediately froze in his bare, soapy tracks - there right at his feet on the drain, coiled, spitting, shaking off descending water and striking at his ankles, was a brown rattlesnake, small, but fearsome, who showed all the signs of deep resentment at sharing his new-found bathtub with the likes of E. J. How he got in there, only the Lord knows - but there it was, anyhow!

E. J. stood there in sheer amazement for a shocked moment, talking out loud to himself, "Is that a rattlesnake in my bathtub?" he asked incredulously. "It IS a rattlesnake in my bathtub!" he affirmed strongly, trying to wipe his soapy eyes for better sight, and all sense of decorum, decency, and grace flew out the window as he pressed the panic button - things got frantic and messy right quickly.

He tore straight up over the side of the tub, forgetting the curtain, taking it with him off the hooks, leaving a trail of foamy lather, wet footprints, and shredded shower curtain in escaping the threatening scene

- headed for the front door.

One of his first cousins got hold of the tale, and he told everybody far and wide that when they finally found E. J., he was two miles up the highway plumb outta town, still digging blindly along in the nude, passing everything in sight, and headed for New Jersey. He said that the highway patrol had to run a moving roadblock on him, throw a net over him, and arrest him for indecent exposure before they could get him back into town.

E. J. says though, "Of course that funny cousin stretched things and made up a lot of stuff. I wasn't anywhere near two miles up the road in the nude - I've got more sense and decency than that...it wasn't over two short city blocks at the most!"

He returned the landlord's key - the vines had done suddenly wilted on that honeymoon cottage!

REVEREND MARK MCALLISTER - HOT SEAT

During the time I spend in West Virginia I work closely with Rev. Floyd Tidsworth, Jr., Director of Missions, and his staff of six area missionaries, as they plan and promote the extension of Baptist work in that mountainous state. It is a small, but dynamic, group of dedicated Christian laborers, and it has been a high privilege to have been a small part of their labors for the past few years in a North Carolina-West Virginia partnership of missions, which will extend through, and possibly beyond, 1985.

One of my favorites among those six area missionaries is jovial Rev. Mark McAllister, who holds forth in the eastern panhandle section of the state in the Harper's Ferry-Martinsburg area. I first met Mark several years ago during a Missions conference in North Carolina when he came down from his work in a northern state to participate in the conference.

He's a native West Virginian, and after several years of service in other places he's back home now and most happy. Mark, to say the least, is rather wide of girth, expansive of frame, sporting a black beard, and can make a pair of scales groan in agony and cry out for relief. You can always count on him to make some wry, rib-tickling response to most any situation, and I've cracked a few chest bones laughing at the funny rascal.

Typical of him was his reaction to a situation that arose one hot mid-fall night during an extended staff meeting in the second-story office of Tidsworth in The Baptist Building at St. Albans.

We had met all day in relative comfort, as the office was adequately air-conditioned, and really hadn't been aware of just how hot and sticky things were in general. We recessed to go out for the evening meal, but returned at 7:30 for a night session, sitting in a tight circle before Floyd's desk - the six missionaries and myself.

Director Floyd got things off to a good start with a rousing, sermonic devotional, wherein he challenged us to faithfulness, and really "laid it on the line" for us in a straight-forward fashion.

However, as I sat listening intently, I found myself getting out my handkerchief for some brow mopping, as I had begun to perspire, and followed this with some collar loosening. I noticed the others doing the same thing, including Mark, who squirmed and wiped furiously, finally taking off his tie and trying to fan himself with a hand.

At this juncture, Floyd paused in his direct dissertation and remarked, wiping his own brow, "I'm sorry it's so hot in here, fellows, but someone inadvertantly turned the thermostat plumb up to 80 before we went to supper - But I happened to notice it on the way back in and reset it at 68, so things will get cooler shortly."

"Whew!" wheezed Mark, in evident relief, taking another wide swipe at his sweaty forehead, and shifting his bulk in the chair, "I'm sure glad to learn that all this misery is coming from just the temperature--as you were talking, I was beginning to believe I was a-coming under conviction again!"

REVEREND JOE S. JOHNSON - A POUND OF FLESH

Rev. Joe S. Johnson, fast-talking Book Editor for the Broadman Press out in Nashville, Tennessee, had occasion to call me recently - the occasion being to tell me that some shallow junk I'd sent him wasn't worth printing for Baptist consumption, but he talked on at great length about other things, too. He has been in his important position for over 14 years and certainly knows what is, and what is not, fit for printing, so I certainly didn't argue with him!

In the course of rambling on about this and that, he got in a good tale about a talented barber which I think is well worth printing, though I'm no book editor.

This heavily bearded fellow went into a certain barber shop for a quick shave. The rotund barber turned out to be one of these talkative, philosophical ones who yapped ninety miles a second about everything under the sun while he went about his clipping and shaving.

He apparently paid more attention to his yapping than he did his shaving, and about every five seconds his sharp, straight razor would slip and nick a hunk of red meat out of the squirming fellow's chin, cheek, or neck. The barber would pause, look at the nick, and say, "I'm sorry about that," reach up to a roll of white toilet tissue hanging on the wall, rip off a slither and dab it on the bleeding cut. He'd talk, nick, and dab; talk, nick, and dab without let-up, and the guy ended up looking like he'd been run through a sausage grinder and hung out to cure with pieces of shredded casing still hanging on.

The diced and dabbed fellow finally said to the bubbling barber, "You're by far the most talented fellow I ever met."

"How's that?" beamed the barber, cleaning his bloody razor.

"Well," replied the shaved one, painfully peeling off strips of toilet tissue, "you're the only man I ever met who could give a lecture, hang paper, and butcher all at the same time."

And the best barber I ever had to clip away at my thatch was a philosophical one, too - a pleasant black man in a downtown Kinston shop, who died several years ago, but who lives in my memory. He'd tell me, for instance, that boils were "nature's way of purging out the evil in me every spring." He didn't smile when he said it!

But I particularly recall one early spring when I told him about the trouble I was having with marauding birds devouring my freshly planted corn and beans, and about how someone had advised me to string up bunches of aluminum pie plates over the rows - then the jingling and jangling in the wind would scare the birds off. Consequently, I had gathered and strung up every aluminum plate in the whole neighborhood, and had enough loud jangling going on in the wind to raise Lazarus from the dead a second time.

"You got some bad advice, Reverend," he said slowly,

smiling coyly, "hungry birds are smart--all those tingling plates does is provide them birds mood music to dine by."

He was right!

REVEREND O.D. MARTIN, JR. - DOUBLE VISION

Not everything that comes out of Texas is big and whopping for Rev. O. D. Martin, Jr., Director of the Stewardship Division of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, came out of Texas up to North Carolina about eight years ago, and O.D. is no taller, fatter, bigger, or prettier than I am! He comes mighty close to having more bushy grey hair than I do, however, and that makes for some one more head of hair. He was my boss for a couple of years before I shifted to my present position in 1981, so despite his small stature, he was "big" in my eyes - and still is!

He served several years as a missionary down in Brazil before returning for stewardship work in Texas and North Carolina - along with his talented wife and three fine daughters. O. D. comes by his stewardship naturally, for his father, O.D., Sr., was "Mr Stewardship" in Texas for years, and O.D., Jr. is well on his way to that honorable stature in North Carolina.

I didn't think there was, or ever could be, another just like O.D. anywhere on earth, but I changed my mind up in West Virginia recently when I ran into his "clone" - I mean an exact replica. I was eating breakfast at the Sweet Williams Restaurant in the large Middletown shopping mall in Fairmont, when I looked down the way on my left, and did a double-take, stopping a chomp on my bacon in mid-bite, for there sat O.D. chewing on toast and eggs - or so I thought. I kept staring in surprise, but there was no reaction from the fellow as he stared back, and I began to think that O.D. didn't want to own up to good West Virginians that he knew me, though he had been up several times in helpful mission projects and meetings. It was eerie, and I had to look extra hard to finally decide it wasn't O.D. But the guy was the same size, same height, same round face, and exactly the same amount, cut, and color of hair. The hair really threw me!

When the fellow got up and walked by on the way to the cash register, I gently grabbed his arm and engaged him in conversation - telling him he had a twin in North

Carolina. I happened to have a picture of O.D. in my briefcase, so I could show him exactly what I meant. He agreed that O.D. was his clone, all right.

He turned out to be A. "Skip" Cipollone, a native of Fairmont, and of Italian lineage. He has been in the clothing business for over 35 years, in California, New Jersey, and West Virginia, with the last 12 being with Maunz Clothing Store in the Fairmont Mall. He married a local girl, Marjorie Keener, and has one pretty daughter.

I got my camera and followed him to the store where I could pose him for several shots, for I wanted to send O.D. some pictures to show him the strange oddity - well, at least, it was strange and odd to me.

In posing here and there about the store, Skip asked after setting one pose, "Do you think this big cigar would make me look even more like Mr. Martin?"

"No way," I replied quickly, stepping forward to hand him another object, "If you really, sure enough, want to look and act like O.D., you'd better take this red pencil instead of that black cigar - and start figuring out your tithe!"

MR. LEE SATTERFIELD - COUNT EM!

Lee Satterfield, a Native Tar Heel, but living in Roanoke, Virginia, is a preaching Optometrist, but he spends a lot of time "out of the office." He is a most active Baptist layman who stays busy and involved in laymen events all over the country - and world, for that matter - speaking in renewal campaigns, revivals, witnessing seminars, evangelistic conferences, camp meetings, church services, and anywhere else folks will let him give his testimony. He out-preaches most preachers, and is a forceful, compelling speaker, indeed.

Recently we had him up in West Virginia for the annual laymen's conference held at Cedar Lakes State Park, and he did his usual fine job of "stirring things up" and getting Baptist laymen to renew their Christian vows and commitments.

One night before getting down to serious business, he shared some "light stuff" with us, and got everybody in a good mood and relaxed. He got us laughing real good with a tale about a certain group of dilatory soldiers in an army camp who found themselves in a collective hole with

the demanding Colonel.

Seems this group of nine soldiers from the same barracks, pooled their meager resources, and planned a big Saturday night party in a city about 20 miles from the camp. They got passes for the day, caught the bus and took off in high spirits. Their passes were good until midnight, but they got to partying too vigorously, got careless and forgetful, and ended up dragging back into camp in the wee hours of the morning, long after having been declared AWOL at the midnight curfew. They were in real trouble.

The next morning the Colonel called them in one by one to give an account of themselves before he was to "come down on them." The first soldier called before the stern Colonel, cap in hand, head bowed, gave a pitiful tale of woe and frustration.

"Sir," he said meekly, "I'm sorry I was late, but I made every effort to make it, I assure you, but was frustrated. I met this real pretty girl, kinda got carried away, forgot the time, and missed the last bus back to camp. But being conscientious, I hastily rented a taxi at high prices, but it broke down way out in the country - desperately, I rented a good horse from a farmer, but, Sir, after about a mile of hard running, that horse dropped dead in the road - and I had to walk the last ten miles - so was late, Sir. I'm sorry."

Well, the next seven soldiers went through exactly the same sad tale - pretty girl, missed bus, taxi, dead horse, and the long walk back into camp, and by the time the ninth was called in, the colonel was ready to hang the whole bunch.

So when the ninth one started in with the same approach, the Colonel rudely and gruffly interrupted him - "Yea, yea, soldier, I know, I know, the taxi broke down, and you..."

"Oh, no, Sir," replied the soldier quickly, "the taxi was fine, and it didn't break down at all-- but I was late, Sir, because it couldn't get through a big pile of dead horses lying all over the road!"

JUST LOOKIN' AROUND

At Kids



BEAR MEAT

A child's imagination ranges from mild to wild, featuring fantasy and fiction, sometimes peppered with dabs of truth and fact. A mere stick in the hands of a lad suddenly becomes a blazing sword in the grip of Sir Galahad, wrapped in shining armor, astride a prancing white steed, and slaying dragons right and left--or it's transformed into a cracking carbine in the hands of G. I. Joe in the trenches of a battle front, mowing down the attacking enemy like falling flies.

But sometimes this imaginative play degenerates into just plain compulsive lying about any and everything, and you can't trust anything the child says as he embellishes all his talk with fantasy and fiction. This can become a real problem--for the child and adults.

Rev. Gilbert G. Mister, long-time pastor of the Ayden Baptist Church (16 years), recently related to me just such a case. I've know Mister since 1943, during World War II, when I was pastor of the Baptist Church in the quaint river town of Hamilton and he came courting a Hamilton girl, all dressed to the hilt in his army uniform. I guess she was impressed with the sargeant's shiny trappings, for she married the sucker, and in the process went from a Missis to a Mister! After the war, he went from soldiering to preaching, and has been on the warpath against the Devil and his legions ever since.

Anyway, according to Mister, this frustrated mother just couldn't handle her eight-year old son's tongue, and he drove her to distraction with his constant wild tales and colorful imagination. He always stretched the truth until it snapped in several places and lay in utter disarray every time he opened his mouth. She tried everything to break him, but nothing worked.

Finally, she decided to try the local Baptist preacher, shared her problem with him, and begged for his help. He told her to bring him in and he'd see what he could do, as he was against all lying.

The wise brother decided to try reverse psychology on the lad and just out-lie him to show him how ridiculous things could get, especially when a preacher was doing the lying. He took the boy over to a window and pointed out a patch of woods over the way.

"Son," he said seriously, "not long ago there was the biggest, meanest bear in the whole world over there in

those woods - over 10 feet tall when he reared up and weighing over 900 pounds. He was most ferocious and ate up everything that came into the woods--nothing could go in there and come out alive. He was a holy terror, indeed.

"But do you know, one day a little old 20-pound beagle hound dog chased a rabbit in there, and came face to face with the 900-pound bear. The hound tore into that bear, and there was the awfulest fight you every saw or heard--and that little dog actually killed the bear, dragged him in his teeth a hundred yards into that field yonder, dug a big hole, rolled the bear into it and buried him. What do you think about that, son? Do you believe that happened?"

"Sure, Reverend," answered the boy smartly, "I know it for sure--that was my dog!"

A BIG SALUTE

Someone once defined a statistician as "a man who draws a straight line from an unfounded assumption to a foregone conclusion." Not many children would be called full-fledged statisticians, but their busy, innocent little minds work like one, and they can draw some straight lines from overt assumption to some one more fantastic conclusions--no questions asked.

What reminded me of this was an incident I came upon while browsing through an old book I'd had in my library for over 30 years. If I read it 30 years ago, it filtered through my memory, so it was fresh to me anyhow. It had to do with a certain conclusion a 10-year old lad drew back during the days following the Civil War, and took place in Washington, D.C., out at the Arlington Cemetery.

This venerable U.S. General, with many honors and campaigns in his past, came to the end of the way and received the full military burial treatment at Arlington--prancing horses, solemn procession, marching soldiers in full regalia, decked out VIPs and all. He left a large family, and the whole entourage of kinfolds, sons, daughters, and in-laws were on hand for the sad occasion, mostly to comfort the slim, aged, white-haired widow, whom they all loved and respected. They all gathered under the large canopy at the grave for the very last rites of folding and presentation of the flag,

sounding of taps, 21 gun salute, and commitment of the body to the earth.

This knickered and sashed 10-year old grandson stood in back of the seated adults observing the various doings with open-eyed amazement. It was the first funeral he had ever attended, and he was most fascinated with all the pomp and ceremony. His roving eyes didn't miss a thing, though he didn't understand all the maneuvers involved.

Everyone rose to their feet and stood at stiff attention as a stern line of soldiers, shouldering long muskets, moved into position, raised their weapons and awaited the order to fire away in the hallowed 21 gun salute. The excited grandson ran around to the end of the front line in order to get a better view.

The poor trembling widow, standing on uncertain legs on the hot July afternoon, raised a hand to her brow, gave a little sigh, and before anyone could reach her, pitched over head-first in a dead faint, hit the ground with a heavy thud, and rolled over onto her back--just at the very instant the first staccato blasts from the muskets began splitting the air and reverberating across the tombs and river.

As folks quickly rushed to her aid, gathered around her, and started frantically administering to her prostrate form, the goggle-eyed boy yelled out in a high-pitched, excited voice, "Jumping catfish! They done shot grandma!"

TWIRLING AROUND

My two sisters, Sarah and Mary, have blessed my life with a niece and several nephews, all of whom I love and adore; but I have a unique relationship with a self-adopted "niece" up in Franklin, Ohio, that in many ways surpasses anything I enjoy within natural family ties, and which will happily last a lifetime, I'm sure.

In the early seventies, I traveled up to Franklin to help in a weekend stewardship emphasis at the Riverside Mission, which is a large and thriving church today. It was, and is, pastored by Rev. Don McMurry, native of Missouri, but a graduate of Wake Forest, who married Norma Cobb Williams of Robersonville, who came into the world while I was pastor there, and who still calls me "Uncle Cleve," which pleases and highly flatters me no end.

The first night of the meeting, they stood a smiling, pert, little olive-skinned girl on a coke crate behind the pulpit to sing a solo, and I was immediately attracted to and impressed by her general carriage, personality, and lovely voice. I sensed she was something special--talent oozed out of every tiny pore.

Well, I had Sunday dinner in her home, and she turned out to be special, all right, for at that time she was the reigning "Miss Ohio Junior Majorette," who, at the age of nine, could twirl a baton faster than a humming bird's wings in full flight, and already had on hand over 300 trophies she had won in tournaments all over the country. By the time she finished high school, she had amassed over 600. After dinner that day, she donned her shining little costume and put on a personal demonstration for me, and my eyes got wider than a cow's in amazement and admiration--that flying baton broke the sound barrier!

I made doubly sure that I got her name, Sheryl Longworth, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Longworth, and told her, "Honey, I'm gonna keep up with you--you're something special." "Aw, shucks," she replied shyly, "you're just talking--you'll forget all about me."

Well, I didn't forget. I wrote, and she wrote back, saying, "Norma calls you 'Uncle Cleve,'--would you be mad if I did, too?" By return mail I accepted the honor, so I've been "Uncle Cleve" to Sheryl all these years--have shared in her ups and downs, her successes and failures, her dreams and ambitions, her thoughts and loves through her growing years, and have visited her three times to keep the relationship warm and personal. It all has been a lustrous jewel in my own receding life, and continues. She is a college graduate now, but still in school working on a doctorate, so all those multiple talents are in a highly polished state, indeed.

I made one mistake in the whole affair--on a trip to Franklin one spring, I went golfing with her dad and the preacher. I buried them good--I mean I really "laid both of them low in the grave"--and I think neither one of the mad rascals would mourn too much today if I were in my own!

A FAR JOURNEY

It is said that time is relative, however exact and

absolute it may be in actuality. "Time marches on," all right--inexorably--but its moving cadence varies in our lives according to our experience and circumstance--in our minds, at least.

For instance, if a boy is with his best and sweetest girl friend, then "time flies" and hours seem like minutes. But if he happens to be sitting in school on a spring day dreaming about playing ball, then time drags like a sick snail towing a battleship anchor--seeming to stand still like back in the days of Joshua.

One of the best and most subtle illustration of time's relativity I've ever heard came from Dr. John Arch McMillan, who was a master at making subtle points in his speeches and sermons. He was good at hitting you with a moral bomb from "the blind side."

This had to do with a ten-year old farm lad back in the twenties who got into a boyish snit with his mother because she punished him for a misdeed and confined him to his room away from play.

He stewed and pouted in his room for half an hour, getting madder and madder at his mother by the second, then impulsively deciding "to show her" by running away from home.

She heard his room door creak open and secretly observed him as he sneaked into the kitchen, got some dry bread, a slab of baloney, a pickle, wrapped all in a napkin, and slipped out the back door--about 11 a.m.

The mother called the father to her side, explained things, and together they peered through the window as the boy crossed the road, cut up through a field, and came to a big haystack atop a rise about 1,000 yards from the house where he could look down on everything. They observed him constantly peeking around the stack, so they knew he had gone no further. They went about the day's tasks, in and out of the house, out to the barn, in the garden--all the while slyly observing the tousled head poking at regular intervals around the stack.

He didn't come to dinner, but ate his bread, baloney and pickle at noon, without water, and by 3 p.m. was awfully hot and thirsty. He laid down back against the stack and finally went to sleep. When he woke about 5 p.m., he was stiff, hungry, and intolerably thirsty.

He looked down and saw smoke rising from the kitchen chimney and knew his mother was fixing a good, hot supper. His whole little being was in terrible straits by this

time.

At exactly 5:30 p.m., he came slinking through the kitchen door and stood just inside. His mother just ignored him, set the table, and turned back to her cooking. The father came in and out of the kitchen without even nodding to him, but getting a cool drink of water before he left.

The lad stood a while longer, stared about him, shifted feet, and finally broke the ice by declaring summarily, "Well, I see you folks still got the same ole cat!"

KIDS AND CHRISTMAS

At Christmas most kids know which side of the toast the real butter is on--not at home with mother and father, not with neighbors, or even at the North Pole with Santa Claus, but down the road with grandma and grandpa! Doting, fawning, proud, bragging grandparents are pure putty in the hands of children at Christmas. And don't fool yourself if you're a grandparent--the kids know it. and we know it, too, I guess, but are helpless.

Typical is the incident of where a little boy stood with his mother in the toy store, greatly admiring a red, plastic dump truck priced at \$5. Fondling it lovingly, he said wistfully, "Mom, I sure would like to get this for Christmas."

"Well," she answered, "when we get home, why don't you write grandmother and ask her to get it for you."

"Aw, Mom," he came back succinctly, "I don't wanna waste grandma on something this cheap!"

And another time, a small lad kept expressing a keen desire for a new bike under his Christmas tree. Finally, his exasperated mother said, "Son, maybe you ought to pray about it--prayer gets results, you know. I've received a lot of things through prayer--including you!"

The little fellow's eyes lit up and he went into immediate action--fell on his knees and let go with loud praying that could be heard in the next block.

His mother put a hand on his shaking shoulder to calm him down a bit, saying, "You don't have to pray so loud--God isn't deaf."

"This ain't for God," he said opening his eyes, "I want grandpa to hear it--and he's deaf!"

However, as we well know, they play all the angles, so they don't leave out Santa Claus by any means, either, and he gets in on their maneuvering right along with grandparents.

One of my favorite "letters to Santa" is that written by a boy, as reported in a church bulletin. "Dear Santa, I hope you won't pass over our house at Christmas, but will leave some nice gifts. Mary has been pretty good--Suzy has been fairly good--but their big brother, NORMAN, has been extra, real special good, and has been a perfect little angel all year long--I'm Norman."

Then, I heard about the small type who wanted to get his parents a nice Christmas gift, but had no money. He wrote a letter to "Santa Claus at the North Pole," stating his case, explaining that his request wasn't for himself, but for his hard-working, deserving, but poor, parents, and "Santa, could you please send me \$10?"

The local postmaster jokingly readdressed the letter to "The Postmaster General, Washington, DC."

When it finally landed on his desk, the good general was greatly amused, but touched; so he put a dollar in an envelope and mailed it back to the lad, signing it "Santa Claus."

Later, through the original route, the general got a note from the kid, saying, "Dear Santa, thank you for your gift. But the next time, don't send your reply through Washington--they kept out \$9 for taxes!"

THE FIRST RIDE

Every normal growing boy, I suppose wants a bicycle. I wasn't very normal and didn't do much growing as a boy, but that didn't keep me from wanting a bicycle--bad. However, I was raised in a children's home, and they just didn't issue bikes to the boys, so my childhood was bikeless.

But every sneaking chance I got, I took a nip at other kids' bikes. Summer vacation time was always spent with my Uncle Cliff out from Tarboro, and I consumed the whole ten days astride my cousin's bike, pedalling all over the countryside. He was glad when my vacation ended so he could get back his machine--with considerable less rubber on the wheels. I rode a year's worth in a week. Later in life, I bought each of my three children

bicycles, but they wouldn't let me near one of them, for they had heard me tell how I'd worn out other folks' bikes.

The first time in my life I ever got aboard a bike was a memorable occasion, and one which sears my sensitive conscience to this day--and though it might be late, maybe I'd better confess my sins and clear the record--Judgement Day is coming, I know!

It was in May 1930, at the Mills Home and involved the shining new bike owned by Robert McKoin, youngest son of farm manager, C.C. McKoin, and was about the only bike on the whole place. I'd watch him riding by on that thing with admiring, but covetous, eyes, thinking he was the luckiest kid alive to own such a priceless treasure.

He came to our cottage one day, went in to see the matron, leaving his bike parked at the steps. Two or three of us moved in to inspect it more closely. Finally, not being able to resist the temptation, I eased up onto the seat, took the handle bars in hand, and sat in spread-eagled fashion like a king on a throne. It was an exhilarating feeling.

Well, a couple of buddies, one on each side of the rear fender, started pushing me along, holding things steady--and I was actually riding a bike! I put my feet on the pedals and started pedalling like mad, picking up speed. After a bit, I looked over my shoulder, and those rascals were standing 20 yards back there, grinning from ear to ear.

The sudden realization that I was on my own resulted in total collapse of any semblance of balance and control. I completely froze in every nerve and muscle, staring wide-eyed ahead at the brick side of the school house coming up fast--utterly helpless to stop or turn the contraption, as I didn't know how. I just sat glued to that seat like a stone statue, and went ramming straight into that wall head-on with a fender-bending, wheel-crushing crash that left me half stunned and caught under the rumpled bike like a fly in a spider's web.

My buddies had done took off around the cottage--and as soon as I could extricate myself from the carnage, clear my dazed noggin, and get my wobbly knees to operating, I flew out of sight around the school house, leaving the twisted bike for poor Robert to recover best as he could. From a safe distance later, I saw him "walking" the crippled bike home, scratching his head.

Well, Robert, friend, wherever you are, over 50 years later, if you'll send me a bill--my redemptive wife says she'll pay it!

KICKING THE BUCKET

In pastoring at the Kennedy Home in Kinston for five years back in the forties, I got along with the children just fine, and never got down hearted, despite some mighty discouraging "things of the moment," for I learned a lesson from long-time Superintendent of the Homes, Dr. I. G. Greer, that served me well, as he said, "In dealing with children you have to meet with them where they are--and take the long look. Have dreams, but deal with reality."

He illustrated this principle many times over in a speech he made across the state where he told the folks about his "bucket-kicker and cusser," wherein he dealt with reality.

He was traveling in the western part of the state one October when he stopped at one of those roadside stands to purchase some good mountain apples.

A friendly, elderly man stood by, with a dirty, tousled-headed 9-year old tyke at hand down on his knees in the dirt shooting marbles, who constantly wiped his runny nose with a ragged sleeve between shots.

It turned out the man didn't have the particular brand on hand that Dr. Greer desired, but said he could get them pronto. He reached down, pulled the youngster to his feet, handed him a big, dented bucket, and instructed him to run to the orchard and fill it from a certain tree.

Dr. Greer stood by with wide eyes and sagging mouth as that lad immediately let out a hot string of cuss words that was not only blue but turned half the landscape plumb purple--then hauled off and kicked that bent bucket like Lou Groza booting a 50-yard field goal against the New York Giants. He was so hot under the collar that the nasty thing melted around his neck. It was most evident that he wasn't prone to fetching a batch of apples for any dang lazy tourist stopping by to interrupt his play. He fumed like a volcano in full eruption.

But the man firmly prevailed over him and sent him on his cussing, grumbling way. Then he profusely apologized to Dr. Greer, saying, "That's my grandson and I'm trying

to raise him for my daughter whose husband is in prison and she's sick--not doing too good so far!"

Well, the next May Dr. Greer's office door opened and a social worker ushered in a "new boy who has come to live in the home." Said Dr. Greer, "There stood my bucket-kicker and cusser--those two things I knew about for certain from the first--that he could use his foot and tongue. I started from there."

"I took him out to the the ball field, introduced him to some of his peers, put a football in his hands and told him to start kicking the fire out of that. Then, on Sunday night, at Training Union, I put a Bible into his hands and told him to read some scripture with his tongue--good and loud."

Well, that recalcitrant lad became one of the best punters in the history of the home, went through college on a football scholarship, and is now pastor of a big Baptist church out in Tennessee!

TRUTHFUL LIES

My five-year old grandson recently sat out on the back steps with my youngest daughter, Beth, and you could hear him jabbering and carrying on like a windmill, with Beth laughing like mad. His mother came to the door and asked, "What in the world are you up to, Bryan?" Answered Bryan, without missing a breath, "Oh, I'm just telling Aunt Beth some true lies." I haven't quite figured out that one yet--but think I saw a pretty good illustration of the principle the other day up in West Virginia.

I was out one afternoon taking a religious census in a wooded settlement just north of Charleston, going door to door, looking for Baptists--or even "Leaners" would have met the bill.

Coming down the walk from a house, I came upon a little dirty, runny-nosed, ten-year old tyke in the dirt street who was struggling with a big shaggy dog attached to the end of a heavy chain, the dog being reluctant to go in the same direction as the tyke, offering firm resistance to every tug and pull. Forward progress was at a standstill. I stopped to chat, and maybe offer assistance in the dog-moving operation.

"Don't get too close to my dog, mister," warned the panting boy, or he might bite your head off."

"He doesn't look that fierce to me," I said, carefully eyeing the totally passive mutt, which looked like a cross between a snow goose and a shetland pony--one of those undefinable breeds.

"Oh, he's the smartest, bravest, and meanest dog in the world, mister, and he'd eat you up right now if I told him to," breathed the boy, pausing in his tugging.

"You wouldn't do that now, would you, lad," I asked. "I'd leave an awfully bad taste in his mouth, and he may not like that."

"Well, he just got through beating up a big ole black bear down in the woods yonder--that's why he's so tired now," he said proudly.

"Goodness, I exuded, "he must really be a fighter. I'm glad he chased that bear away, for I'm headed that way."

"Yea," continued the boy, "and one time he jumped a mean ole robber in our house, chewed his arm off, and chased him outta town--and another time he ran a big ole wild wolf outta my dad's garden. He's some dog, mister!" His blue eyes were shining like stars.

By this time, we had the mutt up and going, and I was petting him as we walked slowly along. He licked my hand repeatedly.

A small black mama cat, with three kittens around her, sat in a yard nearby. As we approached, she bristled, the kittens ran, and the mama cat came snarling and tearing at that dog in fearless motherly fashion, thinking her litter was threatened by the gruff beast.

That old dog's floppy ears came up, his eyes got wide through matted, over-hanging hair, his tail perked straight up, and as the spitting cat got close, he took off, jerking the chain out of the boy's hand, heading up the road for home with that cat right on his tail.

The boy shouted and started running after them, crying back to me, "Gotta go now, mister, and rescue that poor cat before my dog swallows her alive!"

"O.K.," I hollered at him, "I'll save the kittens in case he comes back for them!"

SOOT AND ASHES

Even small, pre-school children, when left to their own time and devices, can be most imaginative, innovative,

and inventive. You can't always take for granted the "usual," as they have no set pattern of activity in any repeated situation--they will do one thing this time, and another that time, and never the same anytime. My oldest daughter, Lou, discovered these facts with the two youngest of her four out in Richmond, Kentucky.

She left Kenan, 3, and Bryan, 5, to themselves down in the spacious basement den while she retreated upstairs to wash the breakfast dishes. There were plenty of toys scattered about before the large fireplace to keep them well occupied--or so she thought. It was springtime, so no fire was in the fireplace--just scads of deep, loose ashes from winter blazes.

While doing the dishes, she kept hearing thumping and bumping against the house and windows and went to investigate. She found Bryan busily throwing a red rubber ball up against the house, retrieving it after every throw and tossing it again, relentlessly--jaw set, eyes blazing, and every tiny muscle pumped into each heave.

Before she could get all the facts from Bryan, through the basement window, she heard Kevan screaming and hollering inside, turned, dashed frantically into the house, and down the steps to the den.

She stopped short at the messy sight she came upon, and just stood patting her foot in disgust, hands on hips--Kevan sat cross-legged right in the middle of the ashy fireplace, gazing wide-eyed straight up the sooty chimney, both nasty little hands imploringly stretched out and up, and yelling at the top of his squeaky voice, "T'row it, Bryan, t'row it--now, Bryan--t'row it!"

Of course, grunting Bryan, laboring outside, couldn't hie up enough thrust-power to left-hand that heavy, solid ball up to the gutter, much less up and down into the chimney--but that didn't keep his live little mind from thinking of it and pushing his innocent believing brother up into the ashes to serve as the redoubtable receiver.

Poor, frustrated Lou had to patently pat Bryan's pants forty times with motherly ire, run Kevan through the dishwasher three times, hang him up to dry, vacuum the whole den, laundry all the curtains, rub down the walls, and nail the firescreen to the wall!

Later when big poppa Don came home, Bryan got him outside and made him try the trick, as Bryan was determined to see his ball go down that chimney one way or another--catcher or no catcher.

It was most unreliably reported to me, by Don himself, that he just hauled right off and easily tossed a dead ringer with the first chunk--nothing to it-- and Kenan got plumb ecstatic.

Now folks, I've been a son-in-law myself, and I well remember how I used to stretch the cold, embarrassing truth all out of proportions to try and make my doubting, worried, praying father-in-law think that his unfortunate, youngest daughter had latched on to the best thing since they invented cotton candy--I bet it took that Kentucky rascal at least three chunks!

GOOD GRANNY!

A baby (He or She) is the most miraculous, fascinating, enjoyable and mysterious thing on the face of the earth. Of course, I was a baby once, but I never heard anyone claim that I was "miraculous, fascinating, enjoyable and mysterious," so I guess there are exceptions to the general rule.

However, despite the smallness, helplessness and weakness, a baby is the strongest thing in existence, and is the complete master of the adult world, especially that of the mother--all her time, every thought, every plan, and every action is geared to and controlled by the baby.

O.Q. Battista is quoted in "Grit" as saying, "America is a country infested with dictators--all of them under six years of age." And someone else once remarked that "holding a baby on your lap was like playing defense in a football game--you have to keep a sharp eye on both ends." You can't ever close your eyes if there's a baby at hand. Babies demand, and get, full attention, and call all the plays, despite any amount of adult protest and resistance.

The line of least resistance to the controlling ploys of whimsical babes seems to come from grandma. She smilingly allows things in the grandchild she never would have put up with in the mother years before. The average child will gyrate toward the lenient grandma like a fish to water, seeking freedom from mother's stern apron strings in granny's loving, permissive presence. Of course, grandma always has an outlet, as some wag has pointed out, "that the good thing about being grandparents is that when you tire of the rowdy younguns, you can send them back home."

A case in point that illustrates the general principle concerns the time a certain dowdy grandma was visiting her daughter and two-year-old grandson. She was of the permissive kind.

As the mother and daughter talked, the neglected, diapered two-year-old managed to scramble onto the piano bench, got all straightened out, then lit into the shiny keys like he was fighting a wasp nest, banging away with wild abandonment without let-up--finally getting on the distraught mother's nerves.

She rose and snatched him off the bench with one sudden, quick motion. In her restraining grasp, the youngun kicked, whined, screamed and hollered something awful--reaching out toward the piano. He liked all that good noise.

The doting grandma urged strongly, "Aw, let the precious little thing have his fun, daughter dear--he's not hurting anything--put him back on the bench. What's a little noise?"

Still fighting the struggling babe, and looking at grandma with disgust, the desperate mother finally relented and restored him to the bench. He immediately and happily tore into the piano again with both flailing, chubby hands, hoisting a cacaphony of inordinate racket that was deafening--giggling and bubbling all the while, slobbering over the keys, and kicking in glee.

"Boy, I certainly know the name of that tune he's playing now," said the mother, hands on her hips.

"Oh, you do? What?" asked the puzzled granny above the noise.

"Well, it's called 'I WON AGAIN!'" she answered tersely, colding eyeing the budding Liberace.

A REAL HILLBILLY

A little daily feature in our local paper called "Herb's Barbs" really said a mouthful the other day when Herb reported that "out of the mouth of babes comes--cereal."

In addition to spitting out soggy cereal, you can also count on babes spewing out some solid truth. Children are so open and honest that their pristine innocence precludes sham and hypocrisy. One will fool you occasionally, but not often. Usually they report

things just as they see and hear them, though, of course, they do possess an uncanny propensity for imaginative embellishment if the mood strikes them.

At times children have left me hanging out on a limb, dangling in bare embarrassment, the hapless victim of their sheer honesty, with no redeeming answer for their childish conclusions.

A five-year-old girl got me good down in Columbia, South Carolina years ago, and I haven't been able successfully to refute her simple pronouncement to this day.

I was in the area speaking in a different church each night in a "World Missions Conference." I was living and working in the mountains of North Carolina at the time, and was supposed to be telling those South Carolinians all about "Mountain Missions," but I certainly didn't pose anywhere as an expert on mountain anything--I've been flat-landed, flat-footed, and flat-headed all my natural life!

So, one night during the week, in the big West Columbia Baptist Church, I made a special point to let those good folks know my ineptness at "mountaining" in general. I told them that I'd just been in the high hills for less than two years, and was still woefully green and unlettered on real mountain folklore, ways, mores, and customs--but that I was keeping eyes and ears attuned, trying to learn how mountain folks talked, what they liked, what they disliked, and was endeavoring in every way really to be "one of them."

I ended by strongly asserting, in light jest, of course, "In other words, folks, I'm trying my dead-level best to become a genuine North Carolina Hillbilly!"

A young mother reported the next morning that she had to work late and didn't get to church, but that her five-year-old daughter was there with her grandmother, and had joyfully taken in the whole service from her small perspective.

She further reported that when she came home that night, the ebullient daughter, already dressed for bed by the grandmother, came bounding to her at the front door, grasped her around the waist, looked up with dancing, sparkling eyes, and exuded, "Mommy, you just shouda been at church tonight--we had one of them sure-enough North Carolina Billy Goats a-preaching for us!"

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A SUDDEN TURN

A child's busy little mind can make more sudden U-turns in mid course than a trick clown car in a circus arena, and you never know which direction they're going to turn at any given moment.

Our backdoor neighbors across the garden fence, Mr. and Mrs. Bob Smith, have two lively, vivacious boys--Lin, a growing golfing teenager, and Gray, a spirited round-faced first-grader, who is as active as a hound dog with two fleas on every hair, and comes as close to being perpetual motion as anything in the whole realm of Mother Nature. What he doesn't get into hasn't been invented yet!

The wife and I had him over the other day for an afternoon of baby-sitting while the others went shopping. In poking around the house, Gray discovered a cute little gizmo on my desk back in the study-- a red, miniature TV set, about 1½" x 2", that served as a viewer for some spectacular West Virginia scenes, such as the gold-domed Capital in Charleston, the New River gorge, the 896' high New River bridge , and others. You hold it up to the light, peep through a viewer on the back, press a trigger on the bottom, and the scenes appear in succession on the tiny screen in full color.

He came rushing into the kitchen where I sat at the table, reading, clutching the gizmo, eyes wide in fascination, and breathlessly asked, "Mr. Wilkie, can I have this?" He waited expectantly.

"I reckon not, Gray," I answered, "a little girl up in West Virginia gave me that, and she mightn't like it if I gave it away."

"Oh," he sighed, crestfallen and obviously disappointed, as he gingerly placed it on the table and came around to me. He sat beside me and busied himself with crayons and a coloring book.

But he kept eyeing that TV--would pick it up every now and then, fondle it, and put it back down. I could read his keen desire for possession as he cut his eyes up at me.

Picking it up once more, he said seriously, "Mr. Wilkie, how long do you plan to keep this before giving it away?"

"A pretty good while, I expect, Gray," I said, patting his head.

He went back to his coloring, but in a bit, stopped and asked, "Mr. Wilkie, do you think you'd ever not want this anymore? You still want it right this minute, don't you?" He shoved it toward me.

"Yea, pretty bad, Gray--I'd sure hate to give it up."

"If you ever get tired of it, I'd sure like to have it to look at," he said wistfully. "It sure is pretty."

He was really working on my resistance, and kept it up off and on all afternoon, never giving up. I held firm. When his mother called for him to come home, he jumped up, put on his coat, and rushed to the door, anxious to get back to his kissing kin.

I sat at the table holding the TV and finally relented completely--the campaign had done me in--so I said hastily, "Before you go, Gray, come get the TV--you can have it--I don't guess that little girl would mind a good looking boy like you having it."

Rushing on through the door, he shot back, "Oh you can keep it, Mr. Wilkie--I've already seen the pictures." And away he went.

I felt like jumping off that 896' bridge!

STUMP PULPIT

Kids are always playing "grown-up" games, trying to imitate their parents, relatives, or well-known personalities. It is said that imitation is the greatest form of flattery, but it wasn't very flattering to family life when it was reported once that a little girl said to her brother, "We're gonna play father and mother--I'll be the mother and nag you while you play the father, sit there in a slouch, drink beer, cuss the TV, and burp."

Boys at the Mills Home where I grew up mostly tried to emulate their favorite movie cowboy heroes--like Tom Mix, Buck Jones, Ken Maynard, and Bob Steele. I did a lot of that stuff, too, all right, using the cows at the barn for prancing steeds and heeling horses, shooting from the hip at everything moving in the brush or attacking from the rear. But most of my mimicking games came from another area, and are still with me to this day.

I knew early in life, at age 9, that I wanted to be a preacher, or missionary, and I started working on it right away. I was too shy and bashful to open my mouth in public, but I was a holy terror when I got off by myself.

When I could find time alone, I'd hie off deep into the woods by the creek, climb onto a stump or big log, and preach "hellfire, brimstone and damnation" to every forest and creek critter within range, plus some cows that would come to the creek for water occasionally. I'd sway and bend every bush and tree within a 50-foot radius with hot air bursts of Pentecostal fervor.

My three idols for imitating were the pastors I had during my ten years' stay at the home--E. N. Gardner, J. A. McMillan, and J. A. Neilson. I'd try to act and sound just like them. I guess today I'm more or less a composite of these three giants from my early life, though, I'm sure, if they were around to defend themselves they'd vehemently deny any such disgraceful assertion!

I think I finally converted one ole mean cow named Judy, who listened to several of my feverish sermons, with eyes bulged out like cannon balls, for she quit kicking the fire out of me when I milked her, and became as docile as a baby lamb. A dose of stump religion is bound to be good for any kicking cow.

But I failed miserably to properly deal with one needy varmit on an occasion one spring afternoon. I was holding forth from atop a rotten log in flashing fashion, when all of a sudden with no warning, a black snake of epic proportions slithered out right between my bare feet and stopped me dead in my tracks half way up Mt. Sinai on a sermonic search for Moses and the Ten Commandments. I didn't try to convert that slippery demon, but gave him a good dose of hot brimstone, plus a lot condemnation. Church was adjourned for that day!

However, that wasn't the last time for that sort of thing. In long years of running around among churches, I'm afraid that I have encountered quite a few "snakes in the pulpit!"

HOW TO GET IN THE HOUSE

Church attendance is serious and solemn business, of course, but often the "imps and gremlins" creep in and temporarily destroy all semblance of solemnity. Seems the devil tickles folk's funny bones in church as much as anywhere, making it difficult to practice "the art of worship" in its purest form. The preacher himself often becomes the victim of the imps and gremlins, with the

devil laughing harder than anyone, I suppose.

It was hard, for instance, to maintain seriousness in the church where the preacher announced, "At the conclusion of this hymn, let our four ulcers come forward to receive the morning offering." Or again, when the poor parson was justifying the appointment of a good deacon as the church's delegate to a certain conference, by insisting, "As we all know, Brother Joe, is one of the most humble and constipated members in the whole church!" And the spirit of true prayer went out the window one morning when the pastor intoned, "And in our prayers this morning we'd want to remember little Tommy Huff who is in the hospital to have his tonsils and paranoids taken out."

And I suppose most everyone has heard of the flustered preacher who was passing out corsages on Mother's Day to certain mothers--the youngest, the oldest, the one with the most children, etc.--and concluded the aromatic proceedings by saying, "Finally, if our oldest grandmother will come forward I'll give her a good massage, too!" It was reported that this innovative invitation rubbed some of his members the wrong way.

Then there are the children. You never know just what they will do or say in church, and they certainly have been sources for moments of frivolity during church services.

Over in Goldsboro recently, in a certain Baptist Church, the pastor gathered all the children around him down front for the "Children's Sermon." He sat on a step on the rostrum while the kids sat on the floor in a circle--about 15 of them.

He was going to tell them about the two men who built their houses--one on sand and the other on solid rock. He produced a little bucket of sand and a rather large stone as visual illustrations of his topic. To open things, he said, holding up the stone, "Now, can some of you tell me what I could use this big rock for?"

He got some pretty sensible, logical answers from various ones, such as, "You could use it to start a house," and "You could use it to start a rock garden," or "You could use it for a door stop," with one loudly adding, "You could get you another one and have two good bookends." The pastor heartily agreed with all those good answers and pressed them for even more suggestions.

He might have pressed a little too far, for he underestimated the imagination of a couple of little

short-haired tykes who about broke things up with their answers--or, at least, I split!

Said one in a high, clear voice, "Preacher, you could use it to kill an old black buzzard in case one lit in your backyard and started eating your dog's food." He was closely followed by the other who piped out in squeaky tones, "If you got home and found you'd lost your key, you could chunk it through the window so's you could get in the house."

STRAIGHT-FACED

Recently one of my redoubtable friends gave me a most gracious invitation--on the surface, at least, but I had learned to take anything the sneaky guy said with a grain of salt and two pods of hot pepper--so I wasn't too hasty in accepting.

Said he seriously, "Brother Wilkie, the wife and I have acquired a spacious cottage right down on the beautiful Chowan River, and if you're ever down that way, do drop in."

I scratched my head a moment--without disturbing anything--trying to decide how to reply, but he removed all doubt and puzzlement by adding, "If you do come and are afraid to drop in, don't worry about it--I'll push you!"

Now, a child won't pump you with doubled innuendoes and mock inferences like that, but will "shoot straight from the lip" and bull's eye it every time. They don't leave you wondering what they mean.

There was this certain father, following his wife's early death, who was desperately trying to raise an 8-year-old son, but wasn't doing too well, so he was on the constant prowl for another suitable wife and mother.

A friend set him up with a blind date, and he brought her to the house for his son's approval. Afterwards, he said, "Now, son, tell me what you think--how does she look to you?"

Without rolling so much as an eyeball, the son replied, "Pop, she's uglier than a bent crow!"

And James Dent up in Charleston, West Virginia, reported on another father who had a sophomore son away from home in college. The father stated strongly that he knew for dead sure that the son was home for the summer.

"I haven't actually seen him," he sighed wistfully, "but we haven't had a letter for two weeks asking for money--and the car's gone!"

Also a preacher, not me, thank goodness, got it pretty straight and stern from an harrassed mother one time during church services. Her restless baby started hollering and bellowing like the Bull of Bashan right in the middle of the brother's loud sermon, so she rose, threw the wee one across her shoulder and lit out up the aisle for the door. The good concerned Reverend paused and said, "That's all right, lady, your fine baby's not bothering me."

Without breaking stride, she threw back at him, "Yea, but you sure are bothering my baby!"

And the same thing will produce different reactions from different folks. I haven't seen the Grand Canyon, but the wife has. She was thrilled and awed by the wondrous sight, and came home praising the Lord and quoting scripture--"Marvelous!" she exuded over and over.

However, my former working companion, Harold White, retired and living in Clayton, told me of a country boy from nearby who went out there and stood in the same spot overlooking the awesome wonder.

Upon his return, Harold asked him, "Well, what did you think of that Grand Canyon, friend?"

"It was really something, all right," he replied, shifting a cud in his jaw, "and I tell you one thing, good buddy, that was the dang fartherest I ever spit in my whole life!"

JUST LOOKIN' AROUND

At Cats



In my happy household, over eight years ago, I put my authoritative foot down about cats. After seeing our last mama cat, "Bootsy," slowly die from a fatal encounter with an auto, I pronounced sadly and strongly, "That's it - no more cats - absolutely - never!"

Well, sir, about a month ago my forgetful wife went trotting off to my daughter's house at Taylorsville, and came back here a-dangling - a long-haired, greyish, male kitten.

"He was so cute," said the apologetic spouse, eyeing me, "and the son-in-law was about to get rid of him, and I just had to take him, though I knew it'd make you mad."

"Well, you'll just have to find someone else who will take him," I ordained sternly. "As much as we're both gone, a cat would be nothing but bother and trouble - to us and all our neighbors. It's not like when we had the children home and they could tend to that pet stuff as part of growing up."

"I guess you're right," she reluctantly agreed. "I'm sure I can find someone at school who will give him a good home."

"Get right on it tomorrow," I demanded.

I took the squirming thing out to the tool shed, stopped up all the escape holes, made a canvas bed, got a pan of water, a dish of cat vittles, and a bowl of milk - plopped everything down in the middle of the floor, slammed the door, and growled back to the house - most unhappy over the situation.

Three weeks went by, and every day I'd anxiously ask the wife, "Did you find someone today who'd take that blooming kitten?"

"I've had some good nibbles," she'd say, "but nothing definite yet. I'll find somebody. Don't worry."

"I don't want a nibble," I said, "I want a whole swallow!"

With her busy teaching all day, I had to take over kitten tending - feeding, cleaning, chasing, and cuddling, as the playful thing demanded, and got, a lot of cuddling - and would softly nudge my chin with his head in grateful return. He'd go to sleep in my lap as I read or wrote, purring like a humming bird in full flight. The thing would even crawl up on my shoulder and sit there nibbling at my ticklish ear. And I couldn't keep anything in my

pockets, for he'd sit at my side and run a clawed paw inside my pocket and hook everything in it with one quick swoop, then try to beat me to the items as they went bouncing on the floor.

Well, the wife came home yesterday and announced, "I've found a lady who wants the cat. She'll be here for him the in morning. Now, are you happy?"

"Woman, I said heatedly, "I'll shoot the first person, male or female, who comes around here trying to steal my kitten!"

FUR-LINED COLLECTION PLATE

Pretty soon after I moved to Robersonville as pastor in the spring of 1943, Mr. and Mrs. Nun Everett presented to my wife and me one of their prize kittens - a long-haired, big-pawed male. We appropriately named him "Nun" after the generous donor, this also being a good Biblical name.

We were young and childless, so Nun really became our baby - fed, favored, pampered and petted like an only child. And did that animal grow and prosper! He eventually ended up weighing in the neighborhood of 16 pounds, and resembled a miniature tiger on the prowl. When he jumped into your lap, you had to get his special permission to rise - he'd hold you down like you were a wrestling partner.

But the Good Lord really used Nun to bless me on one occasion and rescue me from a most embarrassing situation. The Lord isn't restricted in ways He can bless His wayward children!

I had just started my sermon one Sunday night when I looked up and saw Nun, about half-grown at the time, strutting blithely along the rail of the upper left balcony, his bushy tail straight up in the air. Everyone else saw him too, pointed and snickered under their collective breaths. I preached on.

He finally jumped off and disappeared and I forgot him - until a few minutes later I saw several skittish women jump in their seats and look down. Then, I saw Nun's furry head stick out from beneath the end of a pew. He had come down the front stairs and into a side door, and had given the good ladies' legs a good tail-brushing.

He saw me carrying on up front and came prancing down

the aisle like a new bride, leaped onto the rostrum and stood rubbing against my leg to get my attention. I ignored him and preached on. He turned then, jumped into a big pulpit chair behind me, and gave himself a public tongue bath from head to tail for about five minutes.

Tiring of that maneuver, he came back to my leg for a second or two, then proceeded to step out onto the communion table which held the stacked collection plates. He crawled up into the top plate, scratched around in the sparse Sunday night offering, settled down, curled up, and was soon fast asleep - along with several of the church members.

At the close of the service, everyone rushed down front to attend to Nun. He was really the center of attention, as he had been throughout the whole service.

I just stood behind the pulpit, completely ignored, and looked down on the catty scene with appreciative heart, bowed my head, and silently said, "Thank you, Lord, for sending Nun tonight - you knew I was ill-prepared and didn't have much of a sermon, and didn't say a sensible thing all night. I really fumbled the theological ball all over this rostrum, but not a living soul heard one word I said! Thank You, Lord!"

A TRAP RAP

Our first pastorium was at Robersonville down in Martin County, beginning in the spring of 1943, and was enough house to barrack the hordes of Attila the Hun, plus forty of his elephants - a large, sprawling, two-story, nine-room frame house - and when my young bride and myself moved in, it was most simple, for we had two suitcases and one cot between us! But after two years the whole place was running over with collected, purchased, and donated furniture and junk of every description.

One early, generous "donation" by a kind church member was a fat female cat, who soon thinned down considerably when she birthed five fuzzy, squirming kittens under the kitchen sink. One of those kittens I'll never forget!

A male, he was the most venturesome of the five and was into and onto everything all the time, all over the house, up and down. But his pioneer spirit got him in real pain and trouble one early morn.

The rambling house had been unoccupied for some time before we moved in, and during the interim some friendly rats had staked out some claims to choice areas, and fiercely contested us for occupancy. I immediately accepted their challenge and soon got rid of them - but not before that kitten got caught in the mad maneuvering.

I carefully set one particularly large trap on the hearth in a vacant bedroom directly over the dining room - to get a beady-eyed beast I had observed scampering up the chimney every time I opened the door. I left him a generous feast of aged cheese.

We were eating breakfast that morning when all of a sudden, like a clap of thunder, I heard that trap loudly snap, followed by such squealing, squawking, and scrambling like you never heard. I rose quickly and ran through the door to the hallway, coming to a halt at the bottom of the long, straight stairs.

Here came that blooming kitten hustling to the top of the stairs above me - wobbling and reeling on limber legs like a drunken sot, head sagging from side to side, and glaring eyeballs glazed like a Christmas layer cake. In a complete stupor, the poor little thing tried to run down the stairs, made the first two shaky steps, then keeled over and tumbled down the others right to my feet, and passed out completely. He had a knot on his hairy noggin the size of a hen house door knob, and I knew immediately he had tried, unsuccessfully, to beat that rat to his breakfast in that trap. It was a pitiful sight, indeed, but I never laughed at anything harder or longer in my life.

But I tenderly tended and nursed the aching thing back to health - his knot subsided, his legs straightened, and his eyes returned to 20-20, and he was soon back into everything as before.

Eventually, one of my eighth grade students came by "to choose a kitten" to take to her daddy's farm. She chose "Knotty." I'd get reports all along on his progress, and he grew to be a beautiful tom, greatly loved by the whole family.

But one day, she sadly reported, "You know, Mr. Wilkie, Knotty developed running fits and went foaming mad all over the place, and Daddy had to shoot him!"

I didn't tell her why. And I quit laughing!

There are those professing Christians who think and believe that the Great Creator God is so busy running the complicated universe - steering the stars in their courses, keeping the oceans in bounds, holding up the planets, overseeing the storms, regulating the sun and moon, and such stuff - that He doesn't have time nor the inclination to be concerned with and involved in the details and minutiae of their daily lives; so they don't "bother Him with these silly things." I think such Christians are the real losers, and must lead vacant lives, indeed.

I've got no more gumption than to childishly believe the Bible when it teaches that "the very hairs on your head are numbered," and that not even a sparrow can light on the ground anywhere without His knowlege and concern; so I talk to God about anything that concerns me, believing that it concerns Him, too. I make no exceptions.

One of the joys of my present existence is my current cat - "Stonewall." I've had many cats through the years, but Stonewall has been the subject for a couple of these poor columns, and is something special--greeting me when I come home, following me around closer than a dog, nudging, pawing, rubbing, rolling over, jumping on my shoulder, cuddling in my arms, and cavorting in amusing antics all over the place - including my garden!

Well, he was missing one night recently - didn't show up for his supper as usual - and wasn't there the next morning, all the following day, or the second night - and I had an aching void in my life and was moping around like I had lost my best friend. I had.

That second night, on my bed, I took it to the Lord. "You know, Lord, how much I love and miss Stonewall, and how much a part of my life he is - please, Lord, wherever Stonewall is, send him back to me - or at least take care of him wherever he is."

Silly? Well, early the next morning when my wife opened the kitchen door, there sat Stonewall - bedraggled and hungry, but back home! And he's down there right now about to chew my ankle off my carcass as I write this. I didn't ask any questions.

And along these lines, I remember in a sermon once stressing that Jesus was the real companion of His

obedient children and that we could share our lives with Him like a true friend - anything - and that He wanted to be an integral part and partner with our total lives, inward and outward, saying, "I am your friend."

"And folks," I preached, "you don't have to hold back - take it to Him, whatever it is . Why, you can even tell Jesus your big toe hurts if you want to - and He'll hear, sympathize and help."

Several weeks later, I was back in that town and talking to one of the good deacons in the church. He told me, "Brother Wilkie, I took you literally in that sermon you preached here, and I talked to Jesus about my sore toe - and He took care of it, for it doesn't hurt anymore for sure."

"Just what happened, brother?" I asked.

"The doc sawed it off!"

SILLY STUFF

I went down to the local bus station the other day to pick up a package of materials from the Raleigh office. Waiting for the bus to come in, I took a seat inside on a long bench close to two other ugly male bus-waiters who were carrying on a subdued, but lively conversation. I soon spotted the source of their liveliness.

It was a blondish, middle-aged woman seated on a bench across the way, apparently totally oblivious to their talk and tittering, for she was completely wrapped up in the project at hand.

The project at hand, or in hand, was a miniature, pure-white, curly-haired French poodle. She had that thing dolled and dressed fit to kill - with a red knitted sweater and glittering collar, and she was giving the squirming, wriggling thing her undivided attention.

"Now, let mommie's little poopsie be a good little doggie while we wait for poppa," she cooed, cuddling him close as he tried to lick her face.

The men cupped their mouths behind their hands, knocked knees together, and about choked from smothered laughter. I got the pure conceptions myself just watching them trying to control their hilarity. I was having trouble controlling me!

The lady continued unabashed. "Is mommie's itsy-bitsy doll hungry? Let me see if I can find my

sweet snookum-ookums some candy." She cradled him in her right arm against her cheek and fished in her purse with her left hand. The excited poodle jumped up and down in her grasp, panting loudly, and licking her cheek. "That's right, dumplings, give mommie some dandy tisses," she purred, still fishing in her purse.

"Can you believe that?" whispered one fellow to the other.

"Sure is plumb silly, ain't it?" laughed his partner. "And all over a dang dog - a dog, mind you. Folks are plumb nutty."

"Do you see that, mister?" said the one next to me, giving me an elbow to get my attention. "Whatta you think of that?"

"Kinda childish and immature, I reckon," I answered.

"No real man would ever act like that - that mess is for silly, rich women." he added with disgust.

"Gusss so," I agreed, rising to go meet my incoming bus.

I got my package, drove home, and was greeted, as usual by my long-haired tom cat, who came bounding around the corner to me, rubbed against my leg, then flopped on his back for a good belly rubbing. He likes that.

I picked him up, walked around to the back of the house, got in a corner at the patio, looked around furtively to make sure I was alone - then hugged the furry, soft, loving thing to my chest. He put his front paws up around my neck and nudged my chin up with his head, as I ecstatically cooed, "Does my little fuzzy-wuzzy kittum luv him's ole happy pappy-wappy?"

UNIVERSITY OF N.C. AT CHAPEL HILL

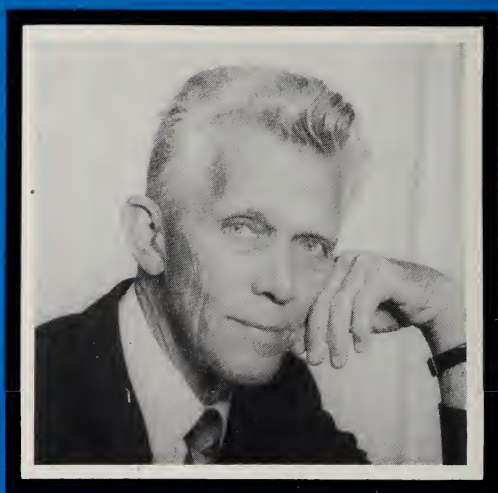


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E. Cleve Wilkie, a native of Raleigh, NC, and a product of the N. C. Baptist Children's Home, as well as Wake Forest University and Southwestern Theological Seminary, has been preaching, teaching, and writing for N. C. Baptists for 45 years, having preached in over 2000 churches. His writings through the years, both serious and light, have appeared in various Baptist publications, such as "Charity and Children". For the past 9 years, his humorous weekly column, "Just Lookin' Around" has appeared regularly in over 35 papers across the state enjoying a wide and appreciative readership. This volume of the columns comes in response to the requests of his many fans, and will serve as a means of reaching beyond his regular readers. Now living in retirement in Kinston, he continues an active life of preaching and writing.